

THE TRAUMA AT HOME:
WIVES OF RETURNING VETERANS IN GREEK TRAGEDY

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ABSTRACT

ERIKA L. WEIBERG: *The Trauma at Home: Wives of Returning Veterans in Greek Tragedy*
(Under the direction of William H. Race)

Drawing on feminist theory and recent research on the psychological effects of war trauma (especially PTSD), this study recovers a neglected aspect of women's experiences of war in fifth-century Athens. Three plays by the three Athenian playwrights depict the social and personal concerns of veterans' wives in ways that other evidence from the ancient world does not. By investigating the depiction of wives' experiences of their husbands' homecoming, this dissertation illuminates important aspects of the plays themselves, such as their themes, characters, and structure, as well as Athenian views on war and its potential to disrupt marital relationships.

This study devotes a chapter each to Penelope in the *Odyssey*, Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Deianeira in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, and Megara in Euripides' *Heracles*. Each work addresses a different scenario of the veteran's return and examines potential problems for the family from the perspective of the wife. Chapter 1 situates the project within the framework of existing scholarship on epic and tragedy. In addition, it examines evidence for the military revolution in fifth-century Athens, which allowed large-scale mobilization of troops for the first time in Greek history. Chapter 2, on Penelope, surveys the importance for later tragedies of the epic paradigm of the waiting wife. Chapter 3 explores the perspective of Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*. Although Clytemnestra is portrayed as monstrous in her vengeance, she also articulates clearly the waiting wife's concerns, drawing on

tropes from the *Odyssey*, in her parody of a faithful wife's speech. Chapter 4 analyzes the *Trachiniae* and shows how Deianeira's past incidents of sexual trauma continue to affect her as she works to heal the rift between herself and her veteran husband. Chapter 5 argues that Euripides' *Heracles* dramatizes veteran domestic violence and the lack of cause and effect between the actions of a heroic waiting wife, Megara, and the death of her and her children at her husband's hands. Chapter 6 surveys the conclusions of the study with a discussion of waiting wives' concerns in both comedy and tragedy.

To Tim, welcome sight of land to this tired swimmer

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Before Orestes kills Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, mother and son debate in a final, rapid exchange about the experiences of husband and wife during the husband's deployment:

Κλ. μὴ ἀλλ' εἶφ' ὁμοίως καὶ πατρὸς τοῦ σοῦ μάτας.
Ορ. μὴ ἔλεγχε τὸν πονοῦντ' ἔσω καθημένη.
Κλ. ἄλγος γυναιξὶν ἀνδρὸς εἶργεσθαι, τέκνον.
Ορ. τρέφει δέ γ' ἀνδρὸς μόχθος ἡμένας ἔσω.¹ (918-921)

Cl. Don't say that without mentioning likewise the bad behavior of your father.
Or. Don't accuse the man who toiled away while you sat at home.
Cl. It's a painful thing for women to be kept away from their husbands, child.
Or. Yes, but the husband's hard work supports them while they sit at home.

Orestes views his mother's experiences at home during the war as passive "sitting inside" (ἔσω καθημένη, 919; ἡμένας ἔσω, 921), and his father's experiences as active, painful toil (τὸν πονοῦντα, 919; μόχθος, 921). Speaking suddenly for all women (γυναιξὶν, 920), Clytemnestra objects that wives, separated from their husbands during deployment, also experience pain (ἄλγος, 920).

¹ The text of Aeschylus comes from Page's (1972) OCT edition. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

Like Orestes, most readers of Greek tragedy have privileged the struggles of men at war over the struggles of women waiting at home. *Nostos* plays, however, stage both perspectives, giving voice to the soldier's experiences of combat and combat trauma alongside what Clytemnestra describes here, the pain of wives separated from their husbands because of war, and the problems wives confront when their husbands return from combat. Despite recent scholarly interest in the depiction of combat trauma in ancient epic and tragedy,² there has not been a detailed treatment of wives' experiences of spousal deployment and return as articulated in epic and tragedy. In this dissertation I examine the *Odyssey* and three *nostos* plays – Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, and Euripides' *Heracles* – from the perspective of the soldier's wife, arguing that each play presents a different scenario of return and explores the problems that arise for the wife both before and after the soldier arrives home. These plays of return have traditionally been read from the perspective of the returning warrior. By refocusing attention on the perspectives of wives, I show that tragic wives voice concerns about their husbands' deployments and returns that would have been familiar to contemporary Athenian women and that remain all too familiar today.

Methodology

The biggest methodological difficulty facing a project that attempts to excavate women's experiences or lived realities from ancient materials is that almost all the materials, both texts and other artifacts, were produced by men and for men.³ Once it is understood that speech about and by women in the ancient world is almost always mediated by the male-authored text, the

² See Lush (2014), Meineck and Konstan (2014), and Doerries (2015), discussed below.

³ Sappho is the obvious exception. For a discussion of this aspect of feminist scholarship and the methodological difficulties it provokes, see Culham (1990) and the responses to her radical position in *Helios* 17.2.

question shifts from an investigation of women's lived realities to an investigation of male perceptions and anxieties about gender and women's experiences.⁴ Studies of women and gender in Attic drama, which contains a large cast of female characters, have made significant contributions to this shift in conceptualizing women and gender in feminist classical scholarship.⁵ As Froma Zeitlin (1996b, 347) writes, "Even when female characters struggle with the conflicts generated by the particularities of their subordinate social position, their demands for identity and self-esteem are still designed primarily for exploring the male project of selfhood in the larger world." Though women command a large percentage of stage time in tragedy, they are represented as the dramatic Other, the template against which the male hero is defined. Women in Attic drama are, as Zeitlin notes, agents and instruments, "antimodels" and exemplars, destroyers and saviors of the male characters onstage, but never the focus of tragedy's exploration of the experience of the self in the world.

Furthermore, tragedy's heroic or mythic subject matter adds a layer of complexity to the explication of contemporary gendered experience from the plays. The mythic setting presents women removed from the actual experiences of fifth-century men and women in another sense, as the wives and mothers of heroes, as exotic witches from Colchis, as queens and concubines. Nonetheless, the mythic subject matter of the play provides a frame for the dramatization of issues and themes relevant to actual people in the democratic *polis*. Though Agamemnon is a king and Clytemnestra a queen in Bronze Age Mycenae, Aeschylus' staging of their bloody reunion incorporates and responds to contemporary discourses on gender, marriage, war, and justice. Scholarly interest in drama as a social institution in the democratic *polis* has

⁴ For a survey of trends in feminist scholarship in Classics, see Blok (1987) 1-57.

⁵ See, for example, the seminal essays by Foley (1981) and Zeitlin (1996b, orig. 1985).

demonstrated the democratic aspects of the state-sponsored festival setting and the importance of the staging of drama to the official life of the *polis*.⁶ Although tragedy does not directly depict the typical Athenian citizen, the discourse of tragedy and the way characters speak about their ethical dilemmas would have struck a resonant chord.

Fifth-century concerns can be traced in tragedy by paying attention to the production of speech as a marker of power or status and the potential dangers inherent in persuasive speech. In the democratic *polis*, speech was a marker of male citizen status.⁷ The speech of citizen women and all non-citizens was mediated and controlled, in law courts and in dramatic performances, by citizen men. David Halperin (1990, 290) discusses the apparent contradiction between the silence of women in public life and their free-speaking counterparts on the stage as a logical necessity following from fifth-century democratic ideology: “Greek men effectively silenced women by speaking for them on those occasions when men chose to address significant words to one another in public, and they required the silence of women in public in order to be able to employ this mode of displaced speech – in order to impersonate women – without impediment.” Because they were both written and performed by men, the speeches of women onstage affirm, for Halperin, an exclusive male-citizen oriented ideology.

Is it possible to work within the bounds of this male-citizen oriented dramatic ideology and discover concerns relevant to actual women’s experiences? Recent scholarship has been more optimistic in its answer to this question by stressing the multivalence and complexity of

⁶ See Goldhill (1987) and (2000), discussed below. Wilson (2009), among others, has contested certain aspects of Goldhill’s presentation of the links between the festival and civic ideology, particularly the awarding of crowns. Roselli (2011) argues for a shift away from the “Athenian civic body” model of understanding the audience of tragedy.

⁷ For a more detailed discussion, see McClure (1999) 8-15.

tragic discourse. Several factors – the diversity and abundance of different roles for women in drama, for example, as well as those of other subaltern groups such as slaves – reflect an egalitarian impulse that was not enacted in the institutions of the society itself.⁸ To quote Claude Lévi-Strauss' (1969, 496) famous remark, it is impossible for women to remain merely signs because they are also people with voices: “But women could never become just a sign and nothing more, since even in a man’s world she is still a person, and insofar as she is defined as a sign she must be recognized as the generator of signs.”⁹ Tragedy displays women as signs *and* as generators of signs. In order to write a successful tragedy, the tragedian must allow all his characters to speak with a complexity that mimics the complexity of actual experience, with a full command of rhetoric, and with the capability of rich emotional and ethical expression.

Despite, or perhaps because of, female characters’ range of expression, female speech in tragedy is often portrayed as disrupting social order. Laura McClure (1999, 7) demonstrates that tragedy depicts women’s uncontrolled speech as disruptive of “the male-governed household and city unless it is suppressed or transmuted into a ritual form.” Many of the extant plays dramatize the dangers of women’s intrusion into the male sphere of public speech – but they also introduce the problematic speech of women as a way of talking about the problems of rhetoric and persuasion in the *polis*.¹⁰ As the converging point for many of the core issues of tragedy, therefore, women’s speech is crucial to an understanding of the plays themselves and of the dynamics of speech in the democratic *polis*.

⁸ Hall (1997) 125.

⁹ Quoted by Foley (1981) 163.

¹⁰ McClure (1999) 8.

The question remains: how representative of women's experiences can the tragedian's act of ventriloquism be? I suggest that if tragic discourse, like novelistic discourse,¹¹ is inescapably inclusive, incorporating the multiple discourses of a wide variety of subject-positions in the ancient world, then it incorporates also, in some way, the lived experiences of contemporary women. Female characters may function as instruments for male characters' transformations and recognitions, as Zeitlin says, but they also speak with words that the tragedian imagined his audience would find plausible, and they face conflicts and concerns the audience would relate to. Thus, while I do not take quite as optimistic a view as Jeffrey Henderson (1996, 27), who argues that drama provides "a vicarious public voice for the one class of citizens otherwise debarred from public expression," I do believe that in certain instances women's speech in tragedy provides a glimpse of women's actual concerns.

The trauma of war that the warrior brings back home with him was an active concern for fifth-century Athenian women who maintained the home as they waited for their husbands to return. The variety of ways in which women in tragedy respond to the soldier's homecoming demonstrates a contemporary awareness of and interest in the difficulties that women faced as the wives of soldiers. Representing home and family, the wife is the primary agent of the warrior's reincorporation into society. Although most tragic wives provide "antimodels," or at least ambivalent models, for women as wives of returning warriors, they also give voice to women's struggle of confronting how war changes, often disastrously, relationships with loved ones.

¹¹ For a discussion of discourse in the novel and its inescapably democratic tendencies, see Bakhtin (1981) 259-422.

My methodology is influenced both by feminist reader-response criticism and by recent psychological studies of war trauma in ancient Greek literature. Feminist reader-response criticism was pioneered in the 1970s by scholars of Anglo-American fiction like Judith Fetterley, Kate Millett, and Elaine Showalter.¹² This approach examines the attitudes toward women that shape the content of a text. By revealing attitudes toward women that have remained neglected or unnoticed, but that operate within texts, the critic “make[s] palpable their designs” on women and changes the way that they are read.¹³

I employ this method of reading “as a woman” in two ways. First, I call attention to a different, female perspective on war and homecoming than is usually considered in scholarship on these plays. Second, I consider how fifth-century women in the audience, who likely experienced frequent spousal deployments because Athens was constantly at war, may have viewed the wives of veterans onstage. I argue for a split response in the cases of Clytemnestra (Chapter 2) and Deianeira (Chapter 3). Two speeches by Clytemnestra, for example, poignantly capture the anxieties and struggles of waiting wives. Likewise, Deianeira’s speeches in the *Trachiniae* portray her struggles as a victim of sexual assault, which contribute to her panicked response to his return from battle. An initial response by women in the ancient audience (as in modern audiences) may have been to identify with these anxieties and struggles as accurate representations of their own painful experiences.¹⁴

¹² See Millett (1970), Showalter (1971), and Fetterley (1978). For examples of feminist reader-response theory applied to classical texts, see Rabinowitz (1986), Doherty (1991b) and (1992), and James (2003).

¹³ Fetterley (1978) xii.

¹⁴ The speech by Medea detailing the hardships of women (Eur. *Med.* 230-251) would have functioned similarly.

Other female spectators would experience a split response, in which they identify with certain concerns and actions, but reject more transgressive or destructive speeches and actions.¹⁵ Women in the audience could recognize their concerns played out onstage without condoning either these characters' actions or the male playwrights' and actors' depictions of them. For this reason, women's reactions to these plays may have differed from the models of catharsis or ritually enacted therapy imagined for male audience members.¹⁶ Moreover, plays that dramatize the soldier's troubled reintegration into his family and society post-war suggest a more complicated response from combat veterans in the audience than do plays like *Ajax* or *Philoctetes*, in which the soldier never reaches home. Would these combat veterans find their problems articulated by Agamemnon? Would they see their wives' problems articulated by Clytemnestra?

I must now acknowledge the elephant in the room: the question of women's presence in the audience at the Athenian dramatic festivals, which remains controversial.¹⁷ Although the fragmentary evidence from ancient sources ranging from Aristophanes to Plutarch is inconclusive, the most recent reconsideration of the topic by David Roselli concludes that women were probably present.¹⁸ Even if they did not sit in the official seats of the theater, women may have viewed the plays from unofficial seating,¹⁹ or, if one takes a particularly

¹⁵ I am not arguing for a homogeneous response by all women or other members of the audience. I am merely suggesting some ways in which different audience members may have responded to tensions within the presentation of wives of veterans onstage.

¹⁶ For this view of the social role of tragedy, see Shay (1995), Doerries (2011), Meineck (2012), Pinchin (2012), and Doerries (2015).

¹⁷ For the contrasting positions, see Goldhill (1994b, not allowed) and Henderson (1991, allowed).

¹⁸ Roselli (2011) 158-194. See also Csapo and Slater (1995) 286, who believe that the evidence "shows clearly that women (and boys) were present in the audience."

¹⁹ Roselli (2011) 63-75 demonstrates that the fifth-century *theatron* was constructed of wood and was much smaller than its fourth-century reconstruction in stone. Several sources mention unofficial seating

skeptical viewpoint, would have learned about the performances from male relatives who did attend. The women in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* are certainly well-informed about female characters in Euripides' plays.²⁰ I proceed here in the conviction that women did view – or at least were well acquainted with – Attic drama.

In considering the ways in which Athenian wives responded to these plays, I draw on recent work that applies modern investigations of the psychological effects of war trauma (especially PTSD) to classical literature. Jonathan Shay, a clinical psychiatrist who worked for the Boston Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic, launched this trend in classical scholarship with his books *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (1994) and *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (2002). In these works, he relates the experiences of the Vietnam veterans with whom he has worked to the behavior of characters in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. While his book-length treatments focus on the epic poems, Shay has also claimed that the tragic theater “was a theater of combat veterans, by combat veterans, and for combat veterans.”²¹ He argues that the ancient theater served an important social role by aiding the reintegration and reeducation of combat veterans and allowing them to function in their democracy. By shifting attention from the veterans to their wives, I hope to show that even if the tragic theater “was a theater of combat veterans, by combat veterans, and for combat veterans,” the perspectives of wives and family members are important in challenging or complicating the veteran's reintegration within the family and within the *polis*.

on the slope above the wooden *ikria* – this “view from the poplar” would have allowed unrestricted access to the dramatic performances to people who could not afford a ticket or to people who were not otherwise allowed to attend. Roselli (2011) 74 estimates that this space could have accommodated a few thousand spectators.

²⁰ Cf. Ar. *Thesm.* 383-432, 545-548.

²¹ Shay (1995) and (2002) 152-153.

Shay's formulation "of and for combat veterans" should be expanded to include their wives, parents, and children.

Following the publication of *Achilles in Vietnam*, Lawrence Tritle, a classical historian, published a book, *From Melos to My Lai* (2000), that connects battlefield experiences from the Vietnam War with evidence from the classical world, especially fifth-century Athens. One of his chapters, "Penelope and Waiting Wives and Lovers," discusses the roles of soldiers' wives, but the discussion is restricted to a survey of the different roles they might play: waiting anxiously, grieving, becoming victims of war themselves, even participating in the slaughter (cf. Euripides' *Hecuba*).

In 2014, Peter Meineck and David Konstan published a collection of essays by classical scholars titled *Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks*, which includes two essays on women and combat trauma that expand upon Tritle's discussion. The first, by Corinne Pache, argues that the *Odyssey* portrays Penelope's struggles as "a form of heroic *nostos*."²² She compares Penelope's experiences to those of "Team Lioness," the first group of American female combat veterans. In the second, Nancy Rabinowitz discusses various ways in which tragedy represents war's effects on women.²³ Some of the interpretations offered by Pache and Rabinowitz complement my own; by focusing on wives (rather than war captives, mothers, and sisters of soldiers) and analyzing their responses within the larger context of these works, I hope to expand upon their discussions of Penelope, Clytemnestra, and Deianeira. In the same volume, Kurt Raaflaub offers a brief historical overview of war's impact on women and families. My research

²² Pache (2014) 67.

²³ Rabinowitz (2014).

shows how his evidence, which he draws from Aristophanes, Thucydides, and Plutarch, might be enriched by the inclusion of tragedy.

Bryan Doerries' recent memoir, *Theater of War* (2015), which discusses his experiences staging tragedies for modern combat veterans and their families, offers intriguing applications of these findings to the contemporary world. Doerries bases his Theater of War project on the assumption that theater can heal wounds and destigmatize the psychological effects of war trauma by sparking open conversation. Doerries and his company stage readings of the *Philoctetes* and *Ajax* for military (and, increasingly, civilian) audiences. The psychological struggles of these two Trojan War heroes – Philoctetes, abandoned by his comrades, and Ajax, dishonored by his commanders – are highlighted and discussed as relevant to modern war experience. The company also produces The Female Warrior Program, which attempts to address the psychological challenges faced by female soldiers in war through the performance by female service members and veterans of scenes from Sophocles' *Ajax*.

Although Doerries intends the Theater of War performances to be relevant to the experiences of both veterans and the civilians who love and care for them, there is no project (to my knowledge) that stages scenes from tragedy that depict the specific challenges faced by the loved ones of veterans, especially wives and mothers. My dissertation suggests some ways in which passages from tragedy might be framed as relevant to present-day spouses of veterans. Many modern sources, including memoirs, interviews, and blogs, voice concerns similar to those articulated by wives in Greek tragedy, and in remarkably similar language. I draw on these contemporary sources as a way of framing my discussions of the ancient material and as an avenue of exploration for future performances of these plays for modern audiences of veterans and their families.

Finally, several feminist theorists of trauma have suggested new directions for feminist analysis of women's lives. Judith Herman's groundbreaking book *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) demonstrates the similarities between private traumas such as rape and public traumas such as terrorism or war. My chapter on Sophocles' *Trachiniae* draws on Herman's research to call attention to the similarities between Deianeira's and Heracles' traumas. Herman also argues for understanding trauma within its social and political context. Similarly, Laura Brown (1995, 108) concludes that "[a] feminist analysis, illuminating the realities of women's lives, turns a spotlight on the subtle manifestations of trauma, allows us to see the hidden sharp edges and secret leghold traps, whose scars we have borne or might find ourselves bearing." By applying feminist perspectives on trauma to ancient literature, I hope to reveal some of the more hidden experiences of ancient women, especially their experiences of the trauma of war, losing a child, rape, and veteran domestic violence, as represented in ancient drama.

Social and historical context: Athens' military revolution

As Herman and Brown make clear, trauma and its representation are best understood within their particular social and political contexts. As background to my analysis of the tragedies, I argue here that tragedy's focus on the traumatic effects of war on both the veteran and his family coincided – not accidentally – with a military revolution in fifth-century Athens, which allowed large-scale mobilization of troops for the first time in Greek history.²⁴ Reforms introduced by Cleisthenes in 508/7 integrated Athens with its countryside and instituted a system by which every free man in Attica was registered as a citizen in his local deme.²⁵ Groups of villages across Attica were divided among ten "tribes," which also served to organize citizens in

²⁴ My discussion of Athens' "military revolution" is indebted to Pritchard (2010) 1-62.

²⁵ For discussions of Cleisthenes' reforms, see Ostwald (1986) 15-28 and Meier (1990) 53-81.

the new popular council (*boule*) and in the now publicly controlled army of hoplites.²⁶ The registration of citizens by deme allowed Athens to conscript hoplites from each tribe for the first time in its history as a *polis*.²⁷ David Pritchard (2010, 15) remarks, “This was the city’s first-ever mechanism for mass mobilization and the standard way of raising hoplites until the second quarter of the fourth century.”²⁸

This system gave Athens significant military advantages in sheer numbers, as Athens and its countryside were home to around twenty times more people than the average *polis*.²⁹ This demographic advantage was coupled with an unprecedented monetary supply from the tribute that Athens collected from its allies through the Delian League and other imperial ventures. The influx of money allowed Athens to begin employing lower-class citizens as hoplites and sailors through the introduction of pay and subsidies for equipment.³⁰ Higher-class citizens would also have served as hoplites and as members of the cavalry corps.³¹

²⁶ Reviving a suggestion by Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 269-272, Winkler (1990b) 37-42, Goldhill (1997) 60, and McClure (1999) 17, among others, also posit seating by tribal affiliation in the theater. Pritchard (2000) 115 and Roselli (2011) 81-85 remain skeptical of the evidence.

²⁷ Cf. Ar. *Pax* 1173, 1179-1186; *IG I³* 138.1-2, 5-6, [Dem.] 50.6-7, 16. See also Hansen (1986) 65-69 and Christ (2001) 398-403.

²⁸ By contrast, the classical Athenian navy generally relied upon recruitment rather than conscription. On the recruitment of the navy, which was the responsibility of the individual trierarch, see Jameson (1963) 398, Gabrielsen (1994) 107, and Bakewell (2008) 147.

²⁹ For this calculation, see Hansen and Nielsen (2004) 70-73, Hansen (2006) 77-84, and Ober (2008) 84-86.

³⁰ Pay for sailors began with the second Persian War. Cf. *Ath. pol.* 23.1; Plut. *Cim.* 9.4, *Them.* 10.4. Hoplite pay may have coincided with pay for the city’s councilors and jurors, which was introduced in the 450s. Cf. *Ath. pol.* 27.3-4; Pl. *Gorg.* 515e. See also Pritchett (1971) 3-29, van Wees (2004) 237, 316 n. 27, and Gabrielsen (2007) 257-258. Pritchard (2010) 21 observes, “The general intensification and expansion of war-making by fifth-century Athens depended on the unprecedented service of non-elite citizens as hoplites and sailors and their unflagging willingness to fight and risk their lives for the city.” On the myth of an undifferentiated “hoplite class,” see van Wees (2001).

³¹ On the cavalry, see Spence (1993) and Spence (2010) 111-138.

Because of these democratic and military innovations, the Athenians were at war for almost the entire period of tragedy's fifth-century *floruit*,³² and many of the plays directly address war-related issues. Indeed, the playwrights themselves, with the possible exception of Euripides, had firsthand experience of war: Sophocles was elected one of the ten *strategoï* twice in his lifetime,³³ and Aeschylus fought in the Persian War at the Battle of Marathon.³⁴ Most of the members of the audience (including some slaves and metics)³⁵ would either have fought or have had a family member who had fought in a war. Though we have lost a large number of plays and many details about their production and audience, it is safe to say that the experience of war was a central concern to both the playwrights and their audience.

In the year before the production of the *Oresteia*, for example, the Athenians were engaged in wars on three continents: in Greece against Corinth, in Egypt, to aid in an anti-Persian rebellion, and in Phoenicia. An Athenian casualty list of the Erechtheid tribe survives from 460 or 459 BC that lists 177 men who died “in the war in Cyprus, in Egypt, in Phoenicia, at Halieis, at Aegina and at Megara in the same year” (*IG* i³ 1147). Of the campaign in Egypt, Alan

³² As Finley (1983) 60 notes, there were very few years and almost none in succession in which Athens was not engaged in some military conflict.

³³ The first hypothesis of the *Antigone*, at any rate, which is attributed to Aristophanes of Byzantium, records that Sophocles was elected general as a recognition of his success in the production of *Antigone*. Perhaps more certain is the evidence from a list of generals by Androtion, which indicates that Sophocles was general with Pericles in 441/440 during the Samian revolt (cf. Thuc. *Hist.* 1.115.1). For discussions of Sophocles' military career, see Woodbury (1970) and Scodel (2012) 25-37.

³⁴ Aeschylus' gravestone mentions his participation in the Battle of Marathon, but says nothing of his theatrical accomplishments: Αἰσχύλον Εὐφορίωνος Ἀθηναῖον τότε κεύθει / μνήμα καταφθίμενον πυροφόροιο Γέλας· / ἀλκὴν δ' εὐδόκιμον Μαραθῶνιον ἄλσος ἄν εἶποι, / καὶ βαρυχαιτήεις Μῆδος ἐπιστάμενος (*Anthologiae Graecae* Appendix 17).

³⁵ Roselli (2011) 72-75 argues that unofficial viewing spaces would have enabled the attendance of noncitizens (slaves, metics, and women). It was not unusual for slaves and metics to serve as sailors in the Athenian fleet (slaves: Thuc. 7.13.2; metics: Thuc. 1.143.1, 7.63.3-4), though the largest portion of sailors were Athenian citizens. For discussion of the social status of sailors, see Pritchard (2010) 26-27.

Sommerstein (2008, xv) observes, “with two hundred ships, this had been the largest expedition sent by any Greek city to fight in a non-Greek land since Agamemnon sailed for Troy.” The *Oresteia*, which explores the problems of homecoming from just such a large expedition, would have been directly relevant to the military campaigns of 460/459, as well as to the often-noted democratic reforms in Athens concerning the Areopagus.³⁶

Although the dates for the productions of Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* and Euripides’ *Heracles* are not known, it is likely that both were staged during the Peloponnesian War.³⁷ Each play features Heracles returning from battles of various sorts and addresses different ways in which the trauma of war can harm the soldier and his family. Since Athenians viewed Heracles as a panhellenic hero with special connections to Athens,³⁸ Heracles’ and his family’s struggles post-battle would not have been seen as mere Theban or Argive depravity, as some scholars have suggested,³⁹ but would have called attention to costs of war that reach beyond the battlefield.

³⁶ In 462/1 Ephialtes, a political opponent of Cimon, passed a measure that drastically reduced the powers of the Areopagus. The political stance of Aeschylus on these reforms, in addition to the Argive alliance, Pericles’ political standing, and the zeugite admission to the archonship, have long been topics of concern for historicist scholars of the *Oresteia*. See, for example, Dover (1957) 230-237 and Dodds (1960) 19-31, both of whom are criticized by Macleod (1982) 124-144. See also Bowie (1993) 10-31 and the more general account of Podlecki (1966) 63-100.

³⁷ Scholars estimate on stylistic grounds that Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* was performed in the 430s or earlier (Easterling 1982, 19-23) and Euripides’ *Heracles* in 416 or 414 BC (Bond 1981, xxxi). Though not always convincing, Delebecque (1951) attempts to link actual events in the Peloponnesian War with particular Euripidean plays. Vickers (1995) represents a more recent attempt to associate the performances of these two plays with specific historical events. He argues that the *Trachiniae* responds to the foundation of Heracles in Trachis, and that the *Heracles* recalls the Spartans’ brutal treatment of Plataea.

³⁸ Zeitlin (1990) 144 n. 16 does not include Euripides’ *Heracles* in her list of plays that depict Thebes as an anti-Athens on the grounds that he is portrayed as “panhellenic” in that play, and thus insufficiently Theban. Mikalson (1986) 98 characterizes Heracles in Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* as “panhellenic,” but claims that Euripides, by contrast, “plants his Heracles solidly in the soil and national history of Athens.”

³⁹ See Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988) 329-360, Zeitlin (1990) 131, 144-145, and Mills (2010) 170-171.

At the same time that tragedy raised these issues of war's human costs, the festival setting affirmed Athenian military activity and civic ideology. As Simon Goldhill has shown, the City Dionysia was imbued with Athenian democratic ideology, particularly in its stage-managing of events surrounding the performance of tragedies and comedies.⁴⁰ Relevant for this discussion of Athenian military activity are the libations of the ten generals that inaugurate the tragic competition,⁴¹ the display of tribute in the orchestra,⁴² and the parade of war orphans in full military panoply, who had been educated by the state and were at that moment officially becoming men.⁴³ Within the context of this triumphant military display, tragedy and comedy presented ethical conflicts relating to war and the family and asked difficult questions about the consequences of war-making on soldiers and their families.

As Sophie Mills (2010) has shown, tragedy is careful to distance its conflicts from contemporary political situations and military defeats, and almost never chooses Athens as the setting of tragic events; the setting in other city-states, often hostile to Athens (e.g. Argos and Thebes), and the mythological subject matter allow exploration of larger ethical issues at a safe distance from contemporary reality. At the same time, these plays not only present conflicts relevant to their audiences' lives, but even prompt viewers to reflect upon the tensions between their obligations to the city and their obligations to their families. Tragedy and the rituals surrounding its performance both affirm and question Athenian military activity; this dissertation

⁴⁰ See Goldhill (1987) and (2000). See also the essays collected in Carter (2011) for the relationship between tragedy and its civic context.

⁴¹ Plut. *Cim.* 8.7-9, *IG ii²* 1496; Goldhill (1987) 60.

⁴² Scholion to Aristophanes' *Acharnians ad* 504, Isoc. *de Pace* 82; Goldhill (1987) 60-61.

⁴³ Isoc. *de Pace* 82, Aeschin. *Against Ktesiphon* 41-56; Goldhill (1987), 63-64.

calls attention to the ways in which tragedy depicts the traumatic effects of military activity on the individual soldier and on his family members.

Chapter overviews

In Chapter 2 I discuss Penelope in the *Odyssey* as the paradigm of the waiting wife. The tragedians look to Penelope as the model for the ideal waiting wife's actions and concerns about her husband's absence and return. Indeed, the *Odyssey* raises almost all of the issues that waiting wives confront when trying to care for their households and families in the absence of their husbands. Penelope confronts social isolation, an apathetic community in Ithaca, a hostile group of men plotting against her and her son, rumors and false reports about her husband, and uncertainty about Odysseus' survival. When Odysseus does return, she is slow to accept him as Odysseus because his mere return is not sufficient: as many wives of contemporary veterans relate, soldiers often cope with traumatic war experiences by becoming emotionally numb.⁴⁴ The test of the bed allows Penelope to break through to Odysseus emotionally. The *Odyssey* thus depicts a successful return and reunion, and shows how hard-won that success is on both sides. Indeed, all the concerns that Penelope raises become fields of contention in tragedy, as each playwright discussed in this dissertation portrays different reasons for the breakdown of the wife's relationship with her returning husband.

Chapter 3 investigates Clytemnestra's role in *Agamemnon* and argues that Aeschylus contextualizes her resentment and revenge within broader questions about the justice of war to show that, while her revenge is extreme, she, her family, and the larger community in Argos are all wounded by the loss of life during the war. The Trojan war creates both political and familial

⁴⁴ On emotional numbing by soldiers, see Mason (1998) 229-230 and Matsakis (1996) 54-81.

unrest at home, and both problems center upon the character of Clytemnestra, the waiting wife who turns against her husband and her remaining children to seek revenge. Clytemnestra is aware, nonetheless, of behavior appropriate for wives, and she performs this idealized behavior in her lying speech (855-913). Through her transgressive speeches and actions, Clytemnestra exposes the gap between the ideal (how a good wife should act, as exemplified by Penelope) and the reality of her experience: her husband's participation in the long war at Troy has in fact caused her to feel pain, grief, anger, and bitterness, feelings that her husband does not recognize.

This play also introduces a problem for wives that is omitted in the *Odyssey*, but becomes important in later *nostos* plays: Agamemnon brings home a concubine, who is younger and more beautiful than his legitimate wife. Clytemnestra treats Cassandra, the most powerless character in the play, as a significant insult and threat to her position. Although Clytemnestra appears monstrous in her revenge and abnormal in her lust for power, she also gives voice to feelings that might have been shared by contemporary Athenian women, who may have experienced the trauma of war through the death of loved ones in combat or through abuse or neglect by their veteran husbands. Her resentment in particular may well have struck a chord, at the same time that it is condemned by the plot of the trilogy: resentment has its limits.

Chapter 4 discusses Deianeira's perspective in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. Deianeira describes her fears about her husband's return from combat with reference to her own past experiences of trauma as a war bride and victim of sexual assault. When she learns that a captive woman is her husband's concubine, her past experiences of trauma combine with this fresh threat to inspire her fatal panic. The double messenger scene, long a crux of scholarship on the play, highlights the cruel irony of her situation: the only woman in the play who shares enough of Deianeira's experiences to understand her perspective presents a direct threat to her relationship

with Heracles. The discovery of the false message also plays to Deianeira's deepest insecurities, as a waiting wife, about not knowing the truth about her husband.

Deianeira's sympathy for Iole, in sharp contrast with Clytemnestra's treatment of Cassandra, prevents her from blaming the concubine, while her desire to be a good wife stops her from blaming Heracles. Deianeira instead seeks a cure suggested during a traumatic episode from her past. Her inability to recognize the centaur's "remedy" as a poison reflects not naiveté, but denial of the trauma of her sexual assault. Her son's harsh criticism of her mistake, together with the lack of social and familial support in Trachis, result in her suicide. Deianeira's story demonstrates that the violence of war and the violence of sexual assault produce similar psychological harm,⁴⁵ and that the victim's family and community can play a pivotal role in encouraging or discouraging recovery from trauma.

In Chapter 5 I consider Euripides' *Heracles*, in which Heracles' faithful wife, Megara, looks forward to a reunion with her husband. She, like Penelope, seeks to preserve the nobility of her household and the reputation of her male family members. Several factors make this task difficult: a usurper threatens her and her family with death; she is isolated, with support only from her aged father-in-law, who can offer little help beyond words; the wider society of the *polis* is apathetic or too old to help; and Megara and her family members do not know whether Heracles is dead, or whether he will return in time to save them. These factors propel Megara, like Penelope, to fabricate an imperfect solution – buying time – that appears at first, with the miraculous return of Heracles, to work.

⁴⁵ This fact was not fully recognized in modern times until the 1970s: "Not until the women's liberation movement of the 1970s was it recognized that the most common post-traumatic disorders are those not of men in war but of women in civilian life" (Herman 1992, 28).

Yet the Penelope story is upended when Megara's husband returns and rescues them from the tyrant Lycus, but then destroys them in a fit of madness induced by Lyssa, the personification of battle lust. The rest of the play shows how Heracles comes to terms with the violence he has inflicted upon his wife and children and chooses to continue living because of the support offered by his friend, Theseus, and the city of Athens. Megara, however, has no opportunity to take part in her husband's recovery. She and their children are the collateral damage of Heracles' psychological trauma, casualties of veteran domestic violence and the war brought home.

Conclusion

Veterans' wives in Greek tragedy speak to some of the most difficult experiences that members of families and of societies at war ever face. This dissertation aims to deepen the current understanding of Athenian women's experiences of war on the home front. In addition, I hope that the shift in perspective offered here will shed new light on the plays themselves: their themes, their characters, and their structure. By combining feminist theory and psychological studies of war trauma, this dissertation recovers an important aspect of women's experiences in the ancient world, suggests a new direction for feminist scholarship on tragedy, and proposes a fresh way in which ancient poetry can be relevant in the contemporary world.

CHAPTER 2

Operation Enduring Wife:

Penelope in the *Odyssey*

In the Greek tradition Penelope provides the paradigm of the ideal waiting wife. When Athenian tragedians write about warriors' homecomings and frame them from the perspective of their wives, they look back to Penelope in the *Odyssey* for the model from which their representations diverge. The narrator of the *Odyssey* sets Penelope up as a positive example of a waiting wife by contrasting her behavior with the bad behavior of Helen and Clytemnestra.⁴⁶ Through this explicit comparison of wives, the poem praises Penelope's adherence to expected gender norms and her role in aiding Odysseus' reintegration into his home and family, whereas it blames Helen and Clytemnestra, who diverge from these norms as adulterers and prevent the reintegration of their husbands.⁴⁷

At the same time, the poem's focused narration of Penelope's words and actions highlights Penelope as a moral agent who makes the central moral decision of the poem. As Helene Foley (2001, 127) demonstrates, Penelope faces a tragic choice about whether to stay in Odysseus' home and continue to wait for her husband's return, or to marry one of the suitors: "as

⁴⁶ Penelope is explicitly compared with Clytemnestra at 11.409-456 and 24.191-202, and implicitly by repeated mentions of the "Oresteia" story. She is explicitly compared with Helen at 23.209-230 and implicitly at 4.234-289. On Helen and Clytemnestra as *exempla*, see Goldhill (1994a) 60-66.

⁴⁷ Doherty (1991b) and (1992) argues that the passages that ascribe praise and blame to female behavior aim at socializing actual or implied female audiences in the moral values of the epic.

in Aristotle's exemplary tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, Penelope's choice entails the tragic dilemma of a person faced with the need to act without critical knowledge of the circumstances." Two waiting wives in tragedy – Deianeira and Megara – also face tragic dilemmas, though of a slightly different kind, for which Penelope's decision provides an important precedent.

Though lauded as the faithful wife *par excellence* by Agamemnon at the end of the poem (24.192-198), Penelope's character is often viewed by modern scholars as enigmatic or ambivalent.⁴⁸ As Irene de Jong (2001, 36) has argued, this difficulty in interpreting Penelope's character arises from the absence of explicit narratorial characterization in the text. Her stock epithet, περιφρον (‘‘circumspect’’), provides the only explicit narratorial comment on her character. By contrast, other characters express a wide range of views of her character, many of which the narrative reveals to be wrong or incomplete.⁴⁹ Because her inner thoughts remain secret, readers must judge her character by her speeches and actions.

In this chapter I argue that Penelope's words and deeds show that she is a loyal waiting wife and a loving mother, who sometimes employs tricks and tests to protect herself and her son. I also argue that Penelope's ‘‘ambivalent’’ behavior reflects the contradictory demands that she confronts as a waiting wife facing a difficult decision about her future. Finally, I highlight several aspects of her portrayal that influence the tragedians' depictions of tragic waiting wives,

⁴⁸ This observation has a long history in modern scholarship, and so my list is necessarily selective: Büchner (1940), MacKay (1958), Allione (1963) 61-111, Austin (1975) 205-238, Marquardt (1985), Hölscher (1988) 243-250, Winkler (1990a) 129-161, Doherty (1991a), Katz (1991), Felson-Rubin (1994), de Jong (2001) 36.

⁴⁹ De Jong (2001) 36 summarizes these views: ‘‘Telemachus considers her indecisive, a bad hostess, and heartless (345-59n.); the Suitors consider her wily (2.85-128n.); Agamemnon first considers her loyal but, since she is a woman, suspect on principle (11.409-56n.), and later, unconditionally loyal (24.191-202n.); Odysseus appreciates her wiliness (18.281-283) and caution (23.111-116), yet underestimates her capacity to keep a secret and hence excludes her from his revenge scheme.’’

who give voice to their inner thoughts more freely and challenge or strive to emulate the model of the good waiting wife that they have inherited from the *Odyssey*. By focusing on the experiences of Penelope in the *Odyssey*, this chapter raises all of the issues faced by a waiting wife trying to maintain order and keep the house and family in the best shape possible in the vacuum left by her husband's long absence. Penelope's struggles show how difficult life at home can be for waiting wives – as Agamemnon points out, it takes someone truly exceptional (ἡ ἄρα σὺν μεγάλῃ ἀρετῇ ἐκτίσω ἄκοιτιν, 24.193) to remain faithful to her husband and keep the house and family in order. Whereas the *Odyssey* depicts an exceptional wife who succeeds in this task, tragedy investigates the breakdown of the family and the household because of resentment and past wrongs (Clytemnestra), past trauma and the present threat of replacement (Deianeira), and the violence of war brought home (Megara).

Penelope's crisis and Telemachus' coming-of-age

In Book 18 Penelope reports to Eurymachus and the other suitors what Odysseus supposedly said to her before he left for the war:

“ὦ γυναῖ, οὐ γὰρ οἶώ εὐκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοὺς
ἐκ Τροίης εὖ πάντα ἀπήμονας ἀπονέεσθαι·
καὶ γὰρ Τρώας φασὶ μαχητὰς ἔμμεναι ἄνδρας,
ἡμὲν ἀκοντιστὰς ἠδὲ ῥυτῆρας οἰστῶν
ἵππων τ' ὠκυπόδων ἐπιβήτορας, οἳ κε τάχιστα
ἔκριναν μέγα νείκος ὁμοίου πολέμοιο.
τῷ οὐκ οἶδ' ἢ κέν μ' ἀνέσει θεός, ἢ κεν ἀλώω
αὐτοῦ ἐνὶ Τροίῃ· σοὶ δ' ἐνθάδε πάντα μελόντων·
μεμνήσθαι πατρὸς καὶ μητέρος ἐν μεγάροισιν
ὡς νῦν, ἢ ἔτι μᾶλλον ἐμεῦ ἀπονόσφιν ἐόντος·
αὐτὰρ ἐπὶν δὴ παῖδα γενεΐσαντα ἴδῃαι,
γῆμασθ' ὧ κ' ἐθέλησθα, τεὸν κατὰ δῶμα λιπούσα.”⁵⁰ (18.259-270)

“Wife, I do not think that the well-greaved Achaeans
will all return from Troy safe and unharmed.

⁵⁰ The text of the *Odyssey* is taken from Allen's (1920) OCT edition.

For they say that Trojans are fighting men,
skillful spearmen and drawers of bows,
and drivers of swift-footed horses, who swiftly
decide the great strife of equally matched war.
Therefore, I do not know whether the god will restore me, or whether
I will be killed there at Troy: let everything here be your concern.
Remember my father and mother in the halls
as now, or still more, while I am far away.
But whenever you see that our son has grown a beard,
marry whomever you wish, and leave your house.”

Odysseus’ departure occasioned a new role for Penelope as manager of the household (σοὶ δ’ ἐνθάδε πάντα μελόντων, 266) and single parent that she maintained independently for twenty years. Honoring this informal contract with her husband in his absence forms the basis of Penelope’s concept of her *kleos* (glory, reputation) as waiting wife, and she desperately hopes that Odysseus will return to the household she has managed for him so that, with their contract fulfilled, her reputation can be further enhanced: “if that man should come back and tend to my life, my *kleos* would thus be greater and nobler,” (εἰ κείνός γ’ ἔλθων τὸν ἐμὸν βίον ἀμφιπολεύοι, / μεῖζόν κε κλέος εἶη ἐμὸν καὶ κάλλιον οὕτως, 18.254-255).⁵¹ Her *kleos* encompasses her constancy and fidelity, her active remembering of Odysseus, and her successful management of the household in Odysseus’ absence.⁵²

When the *Odyssey* begins, in the twentieth year since Odysseus left, Penelope faces a challenge to her management of the household from the suitors, who are damaging her home,

⁵¹ Modern military wives may honor a similar informal contract, as reported by a military spouse in Fantz (2014): “Be strong. Don’t complain. Never worry or distract your warrior when he’s on deployment. Defend the home.” See also the chapter, “But Military Wives Never,” in Matsakis (1996) 195-207.

⁵² Mueller (2007) connects Penelope’s *kleos* with her memory. See also Foley (1995) 105. Katz (1991) 6 points out the inconsistencies between the different narrative manifestations of Penelope’s *kleos*: “In the study that follows, I focus on this double aspect of Penelope’s renown, and in particular upon the implications of a *mêtis* that entails the appearance of her yielding to the suitors’ importunities while in actuality remaining faithful to Odysseus.” She interprets *kleos* to mean, broadly, “everything reported about her in the *Odyssey*.” I am, by contrast, interested in Penelope’s conception of her own *kleos*.

both socially and economically.⁵³ She also faces a challenge from her son, Telemachus, who has grown old enough to begin to exercise authority of his own.⁵⁴ This crisis in her role as household manager results in her isolation: she remains in an upper room, and her control of communication and events within her home is undermined by the suitors and her son. The only way for Penelope to resolve this crisis is to make a difficult decision about her future without full knowledge of her situation: she must decide whether to remarry and relocate to another man's house, or to stay in Odysseus' home as the suitors destroy it and Telemachus begins to chafe at his losses.

At this point, too, Penelope has developed a skeptical, even pessimistic, attitude toward the question of Odysseus' survival.⁵⁵ As Michelle Zerba (2009) has demonstrated, Penelope's attitude of skepticism allows her to survive on Ithaca in the absence of her husband, to suspend the decision to remarry, and to guard against the deluding power of hope and rumor. Her constant rumination on Odysseus' survival, which is often accompanied by prolonged weeping,

⁵³ The suitors damage the house socially through their *kakoxeinia*, corruption of the servants, and rude manners. They damage the house economically through perpetual feasting and wasting of resources. Halverson (1985) 129-130 argues for the following social context for the suitors' offense: "the organizational – and indeed psychological – basis of society is the οἶκος, the traditional family household, and the 'Odyssey' is, in an important way, a defense and reaffirmation of the οἶκος in the threat of erosion." On the suitors' social failings and poor manners, see Lateiner (1993). On the suitors' perversion of the heroic feast and their social and even religious transgressions, see Bakker (2013) 43-47. See also Saïd (1979) 23-41 and (2011) 64-69.

⁵⁴ On Telemachus' coming of age in the *Telemacheia*, see Eckert (1963), Clarke (1967) 30-44, Austin (1969), Thornton (1970) 68-77, Murnaghan (1987) 33-36, Jones (1988), Martin (1993) 232-239, Higbie (1995) 148-160, Beck (1998), Wöhrle (1999) 117-144, Heath (2001), and Gottesman (2014), among others. For objections to the arguments for Telemachus' maturation, see Olson (1995) and Thalmann (1998) 206-222.

⁵⁵ On Penelope's skepticism, see Zerba (2009). On the "pre-philosophical" awareness of a gap between perception and knowledge in the *Odyssey*, see Leshner (1981). Zellner (1994), who focuses on the introduction to the Catalogue of Ships, questions the idea that the Homeric poems demonstrate "a pre-philosophical epistemology."

demonstrates her loyalty and her deep feelings of grief for her lost husband.⁵⁶ At the same time, her skepticism in the face of doubt and rumors about Odysseus' survival prevents her from making a rash decision about her remarriage. Odysseus' skepticism about Penelope's fidelity mirrors Penelope's skepticism about his survival. Both Odysseus and Penelope constantly question the information they receive about their spouse; this attitude is the key to their successful reunion.

Penelope's skepticism is tied to her restraint. One of the insistent themes of the *Odyssey* is the importance of self-restraint; Odysseus learns how to exercise self-restraint in his adventures in Books 9-12, and must put this lesson to practice when he returns as a beggar and is treated abusively by the suitors in his own home. Penelope has also learned self-restraint. Though she is constantly torn between grief, doubt, fear, and hope, she succeeds in reigning in her emotions in order to preserve the social and economic integrity of her household, and make a difficult decision about her future. Like many other similarities that the poet draws between Odysseus and Penelope, this mutual ability to exercise restraint in the interest of preserving the οἶκος joins husband and wife as partners in the maintenance of their home and family.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ On Penelope's tears as sign of her love for Telemachus and loyalty to Odysseus, see Levine (1987) 26, Zeitlin (1996a) 44 n. 56, and Daly (2013) 8-24.

⁵⁷ Skepticism and restraint are two important characteristics of this couple's *homophrosyne*. Most analyses of *homophrosyne* in the *Odyssey* focus on the guile (*mêtis*) of husband and wife. Chaston (2002) and Clayton (2004) also highlight similarities between Penelope and the bard, complementary with similar depictions of Odysseus as bard. For *homophrosyne* as an aspect of Penelope's authority, see Chaston (2002). By contrast, Wohl (1993) 44 detects "themes of sexual submission beneath the joyous ode of *homophrosunê*." Bolmarcich (2001) 213 points out that the term *homophrosyne* normally refers to relationships between males: "using the word ὁμοφροσύνη in such a way also denies, in effect, that a good relationship can exist between a man and a woman as a man and a woman; for a good marriage to exist, both partners must act as though they were male comrades."

The crisis in Penelope's management of the household is introduced in Book 1. As Telemachus describes to Mentos-Athena, the best men from the surrounding islands and Ithaca have arrived in the house to woo his mother and destroy his property:

“τόσσοι μητέρ' ἐμὴν μνῶνται, τρύχουσι δὲ οἶκον.
ἢ δ' οὔτ' ἀρνείται στυγερόν γάμον οὔτε τελευτήν
ποιῆσαι δύναται· τοὶ δὲ φθινύθουσιν ἔδοντες
οἶκον ἐμόν· τάχα δὴ με διαρραίσουσι καὶ αὐτόν.” (1.248-251)

“All these men woo my mother, and consume the resources of the house. But she neither refuses the hateful marriage nor is able to make an end of it, and they, meanwhile, are eating me out of house and home; soon enough, indeed, they will destroy me too.”

Penelope, by Telemachus' account, is solely responsible for this decision, but she is unable to choose between what she perceives as two bad options.⁵⁸ The decision to remarry would mean relinquishing her position in Odysseus' house and returning to the house of her father, as Mentos-Athena makes clear in her response to Telemachus (1.275-278), while the decision to refuse remarriage would deny Telemachus control of his inheritance. When Telemachus becomes an adult, it is Penelope's responsibility to her son to remarry so as to preserve Telemachus' property and position on Ithaca.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ The adjective στυγερόν (hateful) describes the marriage from Penelope's point of view, even though Telemachus speaks these words (an example of embedded focalization). When she appears before the suitors in Book 18, Penelope herself calls the marriage hateful (στυγερός γάμος, 18.272). For the ancient narrative technique of presenting a situation from the biased point of view of a character (*lusis ek tou prosopou*), see Dachs (1913). For the narratological term “embedded focalization,” see Bal (1985) 100-118 and de Jong (1987a) 101-148. De Jong (2001) 29-30 provides a helpful analysis of the topic of Penelope's remarriage from the points of view of all the major characters in the *Odyssey*.

⁵⁹ Cf. the passage quoted above from Book 18.259-270. The narrator withholds this information until Penelope is on the brink of a decision in order to increase the dramatic urgency of the decision and to justify it further.

Yet Penelope's memories of Odysseus keep her from choosing remarriage.⁶⁰ Near the end of Book 1 Penelope makes her first appearance in the epic in order to intervene in the performance of Phemius' song about the Greeks' troubled homecoming from Troy. The narrator's description of this first appearance and her speech demonstrate her unavailability to the suitors, her faithfulness to Odysseus, and her corresponding isolation within her home.⁶¹

τοῦ δ' ὑπερωϊόθεν φρεσὶ σύνθετο θέσπιν ἀοιδὴν
κούρη Ἰκαρίοιο, περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
κλίμακα δ' ὑψηλὴν κατεβήσετο οἴο δόμοιο,
οὐκ οἴη, ἅμα τῇ γε καὶ ἀμφίπολοι δὺ' ἔποντο.
ἢ δ' ὅτε δὴ μνηστήρας ἀφίκετο διὰ γυναικῶν,
στῆ ῥα παρὰ σταθμὸν τέγεος πύκα ποιητοῖο,
ἄντα παρειάων σχομένη λιπαρὰ κρήδεμνα·
ἀμφίπολος δ' ἄρα οἱ κεδνὴ ἐκάτερθε παρέστη.
δακρύσασα δ' ἔπειτα προσηύδα θεῖον ἀοιδόν. (1.328-336)

The daughter of Icarus, circumspect Penelope,
heard the inspired song from an upper room,
and she climbed down the high staircase of her house,
not alone, for two servant women also followed along with her.
When she reached the suitors, divine among women,
she stood beside the doorpost of the well-built hall
holding a shining veil before her face.
A trusted servant stood on each side of her.
Then she burst into tears and addressed the divine singer.

This detailed account of Penelope's movements, from an upper room, down a high staircase, to the threshold of the dining hall, emphasizes her physical separation from the suitors encamped in her home. When she reaches the threshold, her body language broadcasts her discomfort in the suitors' presence: she appears flanked by two servant women whom she trusts (κεδνή, 335), and

⁶⁰ Mueller (2007) demonstrates that Penelope's memory is closely linked with her fidelity to Odysseus and even restores glory to the house of Odysseus. See also Foley (2001) 139. For memory as a determining characteristic of good characters in the *Odyssey*, see Race (1993) 88 n. 28.

⁶¹ Race (1993) 88-89 points out that this first appearance establishes several important characteristics of Penelope: her loyalty to her husband, her distance from the suitors, and her isolation.

holds a veil across her face.⁶² If the examples of two other hostesses in the epic, Helen and Arete, are any indication, Penelope's behavior here is not normal behavior for the female head of household in her own home.⁶³ She takes pains to appear unavailable and guarded, and she addresses the bard Phemius rather than the suitors themselves.

The bard's song, which reminds Penelope of her lost husband, provokes a spontaneous emotional reaction: she bursts into tears (336). Her speech to him emphasizes her grief and her fidelity to Odysseus:

“Φήμιε, πολλὰ γὰρ ἄλλα βροτῶν θελκτήρια οἶδας
ἔργ’ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, τά τε κλείουσιν ἀοιδοί·
τῶν ἔν γέ σφιν ἄειδε παρήμενος, οἱ δὲ σιωπῇ
οἶνον πινόντων· ταύτης δ’ ἀποπαύε’ ἀοιδῆς
λυγρῆς, ἣ τέ μοι αἰεὶ ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλον κῆρ
τείρει, ἐπεὶ με μάλιστα καθίκετο πένθος ἄλαστον.
τοίην γὰρ κεφαλὴν ποθέω μεμνημένη αἰεὶ
ἀνδρός, τοῦ κλέος εὐρὸ καθ’ Ἑλλάδα καὶ μέσον Ἄργος.” (1.337-344)

“Phemius, since you know many other songs that enchant mortals,
the deeds of men and of gods that singers make famous,
sing one of these songs for them, while you sit among them,
and let them drink their wine in silence; stop singing
this mournful song, which continually tears at the heart in my chest,
since unforgettable grief has touched me especially.
For such a dear face is constantly on my mind, and I long for him,
my husband, whose renown is wide throughout Greece and mid-Argos.”

⁶² For a discussion of the *κρήδεμνον* and its associations with chastity, see Nagler (1974) *passim*.

⁶³ Helen, who is perhaps not typical in other respects, joins her husband, Menelaus, and their visitors, Telemachus and Peisistratus, at their meal (4.120-137). She is accompanied by three named servant women, who place a beautifully wrought chair beneath her and bring a soft wool rug and a silver basket filled with yarn for spinning. The women accompany her, therefore, in order to make her comfortable and to decorate her at the table. She does not wear a veil. In Book 7.141-145, Odysseus encounters Arete sitting alongside her husband at table, also without a veil (or at least none is mentioned in the text). See also 7.228-239. The difference may be that the husbands of both Helen and Arete are present, whereas Penelope appears here *akyros* (without a male guardian). On Penelope's "tact" in this scene, see Lateiner (1995) 256: "Penelope observes all Homeric nonverbal conventions of woman's relative physical seclusion, including proxemics, veils, and chaperones (the last two are body-adaptors). Her tact, a convenient name for verbal and nonverbal social strategies, could not be improved upon."

Penelope calls attention to the persistent, repetitive nature of her grief (αἰεὶ, 341; ἄλαστον, 342; αἰεὶ, 343) and the exceptional agony of her particular situation (με μάλιστα, 342).⁶⁴ She names neither the suitors nor her husband, but she lingers on the elevated-sounding periphrasis she uses for Odysseus by separating the two nouns in hyperbaton (τοῖην κεφαλὴν...ἀνδρός, 343-344), whereas the suitors warrant a mere third-person pronoun (σφιν, 339). Through her focus on Odysseus in this speech, she reminds the suitors of her fidelity to Odysseus and demonstrates her (limited) control over the festivities taking place in her home as she attempts to divert their entertainment.⁶⁵

The beginning of Penelope's crisis of control is dramatized by Telemachus' reprimand to his mother for her speech to Phemius:

“σοὶ δ’ ἐπιτολμάτω κραδίη καὶ θυμὸς ἀκούειν·
οὐ γὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς οἷος ἀπώλεσε νόστιμον ἦμαρ
ἐν Τροίῃ, πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλοι φῶτες ὄλοντο.
ἀλλ’ εἰς οἶκον ἰοῦσα τὰ σ’ αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε,
ἰστόν τ’ ἡλακάτην τε, καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε
ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι· μῦθος δ’ ἀνδρεςσι μελήσει
πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ’ ἐμοί· τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ’ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ.” (1.353-359)

“But as for you, let your heart and passion endure to listen,
for Odysseus was not the only one who lost the day of his return
at Troy: many other mortals were also killed.
Go to your room and give your attention to your work,
the loom and the distaff, and command your servants
to pursue their tasks. Speech will be a matter of concern for every man,
but especially for me; for the authority in this house is mine.”

⁶⁴ Cf. Deianeira's belief that her suffering is exceptional in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and the discussion in Chapter 4.

⁶⁵ Hernández (2008) 47, elaborating on Pucci (1987) 199, argues that Penelope acts here not only out of grief, “but with the intention of determining the [poetic] tradition and the form she believes it should take.”

Encouraged by his conversation with Mentos-Athena, Telemachus attempts to assert his authority (κράτος, 359) for the first time. His surprising decision to speak up to his mother is a sign of this new-found authority and assertiveness.⁶⁶ Yet his response also betrays a lack of understanding or sympathy for his mother's tears.⁶⁷ Since he has just been assured by a god that his father will return soon, he can listen to the song without grief.⁶⁸ Penelope, however, has not received such a visitor. His rejection of Penelope's exceptional grief with the cliché that Odysseus was not the only one to die further underlines his emotional distance from his mother.⁶⁹ Moreover, by limiting her work (356-358) and by blocking communication (μῦθος, 358) with the male members of the household, Telemachus directly challenges Penelope's authority as household manager.⁷⁰

Penelope's reaction to Telemachus' speech indicates that she recognizes a change in her son:

ἡ μὲν θαμβήσασα πάλιν οἰκόνδε βεβήκει·
 παιδὸς γὰρ μῦθον πεπνυμένον ἔνθετο θυμῷ.
 ἔς δ' ὑπερῷ' ἀναβάσα σὺν ἀμφιπόλοισι γυναιξὶ
 κλαίεν ἔπειτ' Ὀδυσῆα, φίλον πόσιν, ὄφρα οἱ ὕπνον

⁶⁶ De Jong (2001) *ad* 345-359.

⁶⁷ Although I would not go so far as to say that Telemachus is a “young prig,” in Bassett's (1920) words, insensitive and callous toward his mother, as West (1987) 120 and others have thought, I do think that he misunderstands and underestimates his mother throughout the poem. Clark (2001) 338 argues that if μῦθος means “a public and authoritative performance of speaking, then the words of Telemachus to his mother may not be so rude, at least given the social norms of the heroic society.”

⁶⁸ Most (1990) 41. In explaining Telemachus' rebuke, Most (1990) 39 writes, “At this point, his anger has been inflamed against the suitors, and he is about to rebuke them, seemingly for the very first time. Is it any wonder that, like most children, he should prefer to practice his anger first not against those who might take it seriously, but instead against his own mother, whose love for him means that his outburst can remain quite inconsequential?”

⁶⁹ On this cliché of consolation, cf. *Od.* 19.265-267, *Il.* 5.382-404, 15.139-141, 21.106-113 and Griffin (1980) 185.

⁷⁰ For the struggle for authority between Penelope and Telemachus through control of μῦθοι, see Wohl (1993) 38-40 and Fletcher (2008) 78-81. For the loom as symbol of female authority, which Telemachus separates here from male authority, see Bertolín (2008).

ἠδὺν ἐπὶ βλεφάροισι βάλε γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη. (1.360-364)

She, in wonder, went back to her quarters,
for she placed in her heart the wise speech of her son.
After she went up to her upper chamber with her servant women
she wept, then, for Odysseus, her dear husband, until grey-eyed
Athena cast sweet sleep upon her eyelids.

Penelope's wonder (θαμβήσασα, 360) marks the change in Telemachus' character, as does the narrator's characterization of his speech as "wise" (μῦθον πεπνυμένον, 361).⁷¹ Her weeping in her upper chamber, however, demonstrates that she has found no consolation for her grief in Telemachus' words. Instead, his coming-of-age, as displayed in his rebuke, indicates that she must move toward remarriage, an action she is loath to take because of her continued feeling for her "dear husband" (φίλον πόσιν, 363).

The suitors' plot

The suitors' plot to kill Telemachus presents an even greater threat to Penelope's authority because it threatens her role as single parent, takes place outside of the household, her realm of control, and endangers her and Odysseus' only son. Although Telemachus has attempted to keep his departure secret from Penelope, and the suitors have likewise tried to hide their plot to ambush him upon his return, Penelope soon finds out about both plots:

οὐδ' ἄρα Πηνελόπεια πολὺν χρόνον ἦεν ἄπυστος
μύθων, οὐς μνηστῆρες ἐνὶ φρεσὶ βυσοδόμευον·
κῆρυξ γάρ οἱ εἶπε Μέδων, ὃς ἐπέυθετο βουλάς
αὐλῆς ἐκτὸς ἐών· οἱ δ' ἔνδοθι μῆτιν ὕφαινον. (4.675-678)

But Penelope was not unaware of the plot, which the suitors
were planning secretly in their minds, for very long.
For the herald, Medon, told her, who discovered their plans

⁷¹ Πεπνυμένος is Telemachus' characteristic epithet throughout the poem, even though he hardly seems to embody it in Book 1. Penelope's reaction to his speech, however, indicates that he is beginning to grow into his epithet, as Heath (2001) 139 argues: "The young man has just begun to act in accordance with his mature character."

while he was outside the court and they were weaving their cunning within.

By specifying that not much time had passed before Medon conveyed the news to her (οὐδὲ... πολὺν χρόνον, 675), and by placing this scene directly after the scene in which the suitors hatch their plot, the narrator calls attention to Penelope's access to information. This scene also provides a point of contrast with scenes in tragedy that dramatize the interactions between a herald and a waiting wife. In tragedy, heralds are characterized as hostile to the wife,⁷² or at least self-interested,⁷³ as they often deceive her with false information about her husband. Later in the epic, Penelope demonstrates her skeptical approach to rumors about her husband.⁷⁴ Yet here, in Penelope's second appearance in the epic, the narrator introduces her relationship with a truthful and trusted herald as evidence of her behind-the-scenes control of information networks on Ithaca.⁷⁵ This control contrasts with the public challenge to her authority, and the crisis of her management, displayed in her first appearance in Book 1.

Penelope addresses Medon with her anxieties about what is happening within the house even before he delivers his news:

“κῆρυξ, τίπτε δέ σε πρόεσαν μνηστήρες ἀγαυοί;
ἦ εἰπέμεναι δμωῆσιν Ὀδυσσῆος θείοιο
ἔργων παύσασθαι, σφίσι δ' αὐτοῖς δαῖτα πένεσθαι;
μὴ μνηστεύσαντες μηδ' ἄλλοθ' ὀμιλήσαντες

⁷² Clytemnestra calls the constant stream of rumors “malignant” (κληδόνας παλιγκότους, *Ag.* 863). At *Eur. Her.* 551-553, Megara receives a false report about her husband's death from Eurystheus' messengers, who, as Heracles' enemies, intend to deceive her. See the discussion of the tragic *topos* in Chapter 3.

⁷³ See the discussion of the double messenger scene in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* in Chapter 4.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Od.* 14.126-130, 19.185-202, and the discussion below. At *Od.* 14.126-130, Eumaeus underestimates Penelope's ability to deal with these reports, as revealed in her shrewd response to beggar-Odysseus' story in Book 19.

⁷⁵ Because of his kindness toward Telemachus, Medon is spared, along with Phemius, by Odysseus after he slaughters the suitors (*Od.* 22.357-380). Medon also advocates for the justice of Odysseus' slaughter of the suitors before their fathers at *Od.* 24.439-450. His leak to Penelope, which is repeated at *Od.* 16.412, establishes that he is a good character before his climactic scene of supplication in Book 22.

ὔστατα καὶ πύματα νῦν ἐνθάδε δειπνήσειαν·
οἱ θάμ' ἀγειρόμενοι βίοτον κατακείρετε πολλόν,
κτῆσιν Τηλεμάχιο δαίφρονος.” (4.681-687)

“Herald, why have the lordly suitors sent you?
Was it to tell the slave women of divine Odysseus
to cease from their work, and prepare a feast for them?
Neither courting nor getting together elsewhere,
may they now feast here for the final and last time,
you who often gather here and devour much sustenance,
the property of wise Telemachus.”

By preempting the herald’s speech, Penelope indicates that the social and economic strain of the suitors upon her household is foremost in her mind. She frames her complaint with the names of Odysseus and Telemachus, modified by the laudatory epithets “divine” (Ὀδυσσῆος θεῖοιο, 682) and “wise” (Τηλεμάχιο δαίφρονος, 687), in order to emphasize that the property the suitors are consuming does not belong to them, but rather to Odysseus and his son. She concludes her speech by contrasting the moral character of Odysseus, who never treated his subjects poorly, with the destructive behavior of the suitors (4.687-695). The comparison highlights the injustice of the suitors’ economic and social abuse of her household.

Medon, however, has come to report a much worse injustice: the suitors are planning to kill Telemachus on his way back from Pylos and Sparta. Penelope’s reaction again provides a window into her character as a caring mother:

ὡς φάτο, τῆς δ’ αὐτοῦ λύτο γούνατα καὶ φίλον ἦτορ,
δὴν δέ μιν ἀμφασίη ἐπέων λάβε· τῷ δέ οἱ ὄσσε
δακρυόφι πλήσθεν, θαλερῆ δέ οἱ ἔσχετο φωνή. (4.703-705)

So he spoke, and her knees and heart were loosened on the spot.
For a long time speechlessness took hold of her, both eyes
were filled with tears, and her robust voice was stifled.

The loosening of knees and heart is a common Homeric response to the sudden recognition of life-threatening danger; Odysseus reacts similarly when he is stranded at sea and realizes that the

nearby landmass greets him only with cliffs, reefs, and rock (5.405-406), as do the suitors when they realize that Odysseus intends to kill them all (22.68).⁷⁶ Penelope reacts viscerally to the sudden recognition of danger threatening not her own safety, but her son's. As Richard Heitman (2005, 36) remarks, "The use of this formula for Penelope shows that she feels the threat to her son as a mortal threat to herself."⁷⁷ Telemachus has not died yet, but Penelope responds as if the worst has already happened because his survival is beyond her power to control. Her spontaneous tears and speechlessness, emphasized by the absence of her "robust voice" (θαλεροῆ... φωνή, 705), testify to her grief and fear for the safety of her only son, along with her frustration at her inability to help him.

Yet when Penelope recovers her voice, she is interested more in Telemachus' decision to leave the household without her knowing than in the suitors' plot:

“κῆρυξ, τίπτε δέ μοι πάϊς οἴχεται; οὐδέ τί μιν χρεὼ
νηῶν ὠκυπόρων ἐπιβαινέμεν, αἶθ' ἄλῶς ἵπποι
ἀνδράσι γίγνονται, περὶ ὧσι δὲ πούλυν ἐφ' ὑγρῆν.
ἦ ἵνα μηδ' ὄνομ' αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀνθρώποισι λίπηται;” (4.707-710)

“Herald, why has my son left? Surely he had no need
to board swift-sailing ships, which have become men's horses
of the sea, and cross over the wide waters.
Was it so that not even his name may remain among men?”

Penelope cannot understand Telemachus' "need" (χρεώ, 707) to leave, which takes him outside of her sphere of control, and consequently challenges her ability to protect him. Her rhetorical

⁷⁶ Cf. also 5.297, 22.147, of the sudden recognition of imminent danger. Interestingly, Penelope and Laertes also respond with loosened limbs and hearts when they first recognize Odysseus. In each case, sudden recognition precipitates this reaction. Heitman (2005) 35 has a slightly different view: "Each instance [of this formula] describes an extreme, genuine, uncontrollable emotion, usually the fear of certain – or what appears to be certain – death."

⁷⁷ See also Turkeltaub (2015) 289: "Penelope's reactions to hearing about Telemachus' departure and the suitors' plans for him reveal that she immediately despairs about his survival and sympathetically experiences his imagined death."

questions underline her grief at Telemachus' departure and show that she still views Telemachus as a *παῖς* who requires her supervision.⁷⁸ Her extreme grief thus also represents a motherly reaction to Telemachus' coming-of-age and the resulting separation from her that the process of growing up entails.⁷⁹

Penelope's helplessness is symbolized by the location of her mourning after the herald leaves:

τὴν δ' ἄχος ἀμφεχύθη θυμοφθόρον, οὐδ' ἄρ' ἔτ' ἔτλη
δίφρω ἐφέζεσθαι πολλῶν κατὰ οἶκον ἐόντων,
ἀλλ' ἄρ' ἐπ' οὐδοῦ ἴξε πολυκμήτου θαλάμοιο
οἴκτρ' ὀλοφυρομένη· περὶ δὲ δμῶαί μινύριζον
πάσαι, ὅσαι κατὰ δώματ' ἔσαν νέαι ἠδὲ παλαιαί. (4.716-720)

A heart-destroying grief poured over her, and she could endure no longer to sit on one of the many chairs in the house, but instead sat upon the threshold of the intricately built bedroom, moaning pathetically. And around her all the female slaves who were in the house, both young and old, whimpered lament.

Just as Odysseus performs his vulnerability and low position in the house in Book 17 by taking a seat on the threshold,⁸⁰ Penelope performs her loss of control, helplessness to protect her son, and

⁷⁸ This idea is confirmed by Penelope's later speech to her dream vision of Iphthime, sent by Athena: *νῦν αὖ παῖς ἀγαπητὸς ἔβη κοίλης ἐπὶ νηός, / νήπιος, οὔτε πόνων εὖ εἰδὼς οὔτ' ἀγοράων* ("And now in turn my beloved child has embarked upon a hollow ship, a mere babe, who does not know well either toils or assemblies," *Od.* 4.817-818). See Heath (2001) 131-133 for a discussion of *νήπιος*.

⁷⁹ Eckert (1963) notes the importance of this element in initiation rituals: "Boys are frequently removed secretly and at night, and the mothers are told that the gods have stolen them and may kill them. This helps effect a break with the maternal world, since the boys' 'death' is to a large degree a death to childhood and effeminizing influence." Pozzi (1999) 31 compares Telemachus with Hyllus in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: "That neither mother of her own accord prompts her son to leave offers a subtle hint and a trigger for the action of initiation that must ensue, since each young man ought to leave behind the maternal space of the household and literally as well as symbolically access the masculine sphere of action and authority."

⁸⁰ On thresholds in the *Odyssey*, see Goldhill (1988) 10-11, Lateiner (1992) 147, Reece (1993) 16, and Segal (1994b) 79-84. Houston (1975) links Odysseus' increasing status in his household with his movement from threshold to *δίφρος* to *θρόνος*.

vulnerability to the plots of the suitors by refusing to sit in a chair. Character speech used by the narrator (θυμοφθόρον, 716) increases the *pathos* of the scene.⁸¹ This scene marks the most desperate moment in Penelope's crisis.

Penelope associates the outside world, and especially the sea, with loss. Odysseus' departure has begun to seem like a permanent loss to her,⁸² and she fears that the same thing will happen to Telemachus. Penelope directly compares Odysseus' and Telemachus' departures in a speech to her maids:

“κλύτε, φίλοι· πέρι γάρ μοι Ὀλύμπιος ἄλγε' ἔδωκεν
ἐκ πασέων, ὅσσαι μοι ὁμοῦ τράφεν ἠδ' ἐγένοντο,
ἢ πρὶν μὲν πόσιν ἐσθλὸν ἀπώλεσα θυμολέοντα,
παντοίης ἀρετῆσι κεκασμένον ἐν Δαναοῖσιν,
ἐσθλόν, τοῦ κλέος εὐρὺ καθ' Ἑλλάδα καὶ μέσον Ἄργος.
νῦν αὖ παῖδ' ἀγαπητὸν ἀνηρείψαντο θύελλαι
ἀκλέα ἐκ μεγάρων, οὐδ' ὄρμηθέντος ἄκουσα.” (4.722-728)

“Listen, friends, for Olympus has given me grief
above all those who were born and raised alongside me.
Long ago I lost my brave husband, with a heart like a lion's,
who excelled among the Danaans in every kind of excellence,
a brave man, whose glory is well-known throughout Greece and mid-Argos.
But now again storm winds have snatched my beloved son away
from our halls without report. I didn't even hear about his departure.”

Telemachus' departure is even worse than Odysseus' for Penelope because she had no chance to prepare for it; Telemachus had cut off communication with her. She contrasts Odysseus' wide renown throughout Greece (κλέος εὐρὺ καθ' Ἑλλάδα καὶ μέσον Ἄργος, 726) with

⁸¹ De Jong (2001) *ad* 716-719 notes that θυμοφθόρος is used only here in narrator-text, as opposed to four times in character speech. On character language as distinct from narrator language in the epics, see Griffin (1986) and de Jong (1988), (1992) and (1997).

⁸² Penelope, like other characters in the *Odyssey*, wavers in her opinion of Odysseus as alive or dead. Here and at 1.343-344, 2.96, 19.141, 19.257-258, 19.313 she asserts that he is dead, whereas at 4.832-834 she expresses hope that he is alive. Her assertions of his death far outweigh her hope that he has survived, as is typical of her skeptical outlook.

Telemachus' lack of renown even in his own home (ἀκλέα ἐκ μεγάρων, 728). Ironically, as the reader knows from the Mentos-Athena scene in Book 1, Telemachus has set out on his journey in order to discover what is said (κλέος, 1.283) about his father's return and also to gain renown (κλέος, 1.298) for himself. Yet according to Penelope, who still views her son as a child and does not understand the purpose of his journey, Telemachus has left not of his own initiative, but is, rather, swept away by storm winds (727-728).⁸³ Whereas the narrator has begun drawing close comparisons between Telemachus and Odysseus, Penelope still views her son as less capable.⁸⁴

Loss of control over communication in her home startles and angers Penelope, and she blames her slaves for allowing Telemachus to leave without her knowing:

“σχέτλιαι, οὐδ’ ὑμεῖς περ ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θέσθε ἐκάστη
ἐκ λεχέων μ’ ἀνεγείρωι, ἐπιστάμεναι σάφα θυμῶ,
ὄππότε κείνος ἔβη κοίλην ἐπὶ νῆα μέλαιναν.
εἰ γὰρ ἐγὼ πυθόμην ταύτην ὁδὸν ὀρμαίνοντα,
τῶ κε μάλ’ ἢ κεν μείνε, καὶ ἐσσύμενός περ ὁδοῖο,
ἢ κέ με τεθνηῦιαν ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἔλειπεν.” (4.729-734)

“You are cruel. It did not even occur to a single one of you to rouse me from bed, though you knew clearly in your hearts when he boarded the hollow, black ship. For if I had found out that he was considering this journey, then by all means he would have stayed, even though eager for the road, or he would have left me dead in the halls.”

Penelope relied upon a functioning system of information exchange through her slaves to stop Telemachus from leaving: the female slaves, whose trustworthy character was emphasized in

⁸³ Telemachus describes his father's departure to Mentos-Athena with similar words: νῦν δέ μιν ἀκλειῶς ἄρπυιαι ἀνηρείψαντο· / οἴχετ’ ἄϊστος, ἄπυστος, ἐμοὶ δ’ ὀδύνας τε γόους τε / κάλλιπεν (“But as things are, storm winds have snatched him away without report; he went away unseen and unheard of, and he left pain and weeping for me,” 1.241-243.)

⁸⁴ Telemachus learns to act more like his father as part of his process of maturation. See Heath (2001) on how Telemachus' speech becomes more like his father's over the course of the epic. Roisman (1994) argues that Telemachus must outgrow his epithet πεπνυμένος, which she glosses as “straightforward” and “sincere” in speech, and learn to be κερδαλέος, a characteristic of his father.

Penelope's first appearance (κεδνή, 335), kept her informed of the men's activities despite her isolation in her upper room.⁸⁵ When this system fails because of Telemachus' intervention, Penelope considers, as a last resort, reaching out to Laertes, the only other male relative near enough to help:

“εἰ δὴ πού τινα κείνος ἐνὶ φρεσὶ μῆτιν ὑφήνας
ἔξελθὼν λαοῖσιν ὀδύρεται, οἷ μεμάασιν
ὄν καὶ Ὀδυσσῆος φθῖσαι γόνον ἀντιθέοιο.” (4.739-741)

“Perhaps that man [Laertes], having woven a cunning plan in his mind, will go and weep before the people, who are eager to destroy his offspring and the offspring of godlike Odysseus.”

Penelope's ability to influence events stops at the door of her home; if she wishes to influence people or events beyond the home, she must appeal to a male relative to make the case for her.

At the same time, the suitors underestimate Penelope's knowledge of their activities and her authority in the household. Directly after Penelope rebukes her slaves for not telling her about Telemachus' departure, the narrator describes how the suitors misinterpret the sounds of her mourning and prayer to Athena:

ὡς εἰποῦσ' ὀλόλυξε, θεὰ δέ οἱ ἔκλυεν ἀρῆς.
μνηστήρες δ' ὀμάδησαν ἀνὰ μέγαρα σκιάοντα·
ὦδε δέ τις εἶπεσκε νέων ὑπερηνοροέοντων·
“ἦ μάλα δὴ γάμον ἄμμι πολυμνήστη βασιλεία
ἀρτύει, οὐδέ τι οἶδεν ὃ οἱ φόνος υἱὶ τέτυκται.”
ὡς ἄρα τις εἶπεσκε, τὰ δ' οὐ ἴσαν ὡς ἐτέτυκτο. (4.767-772)

She spoke in this way and raised the sacred cry, and the goddess heard her prayer. The suitors, however, burst into uproar throughout the shadowy halls, and one of the arrogant young men would speak as follows:

⁸⁵ On the uncertainty of status and the terminology of slavery in the *Odyssey*, see Thalmann (1998) 15-20. On the relationship between masters and slaves more generally in the *Odyssey*, Thalmann (1998) 22 notes, “The relation between masters and slaves portrayed within the poem is, at its best, not marked by the former's attempt to discredit or humiliate [...] the latter, but rather by affection between masters and ‘good’ slaves.” Penelope's relations with slaves follow this model, as exemplified in her contrasting treatment of Melantho, the “bad” slave, and Eurynome, the “good” slave at 19.91-101. On this passage, see Thalmann (1998) 70-71.

“Surely now the queen, wooed by many, is preparing a wedding for us,
but she has no idea that murder has been arranged for her son.”
So would one of them speak, but they had no idea how these things had been
arranged to happen.

The juxtaposition of these two scenes shows that Penelope is in fact far more aware of the events in her household than the suitors are. The suitors’ sense of irony – that Penelope is preparing a wedding while they prepare a death – is inverted with greater irony by the narrator’s sly appropriation of the suitors’ words: **οὐδέ τι οἶδεν** ὅ οἱ φόνοσ υἱὶ **τέτυκται** (“she has no idea that murder has been arranged for her son,” 771) becomes **τὰ δ’ οὐ ἴσαν** ὡς **ἐτέτυκτο** (“they had no idea how these things had been arranged to happen,” 772).⁸⁶

Finally, though the suitors set their trap for Telemachus, it is Penelope who is compared to a trapped predator:

ἦ δ’ ὑπερῳίῳ αὖθι περίφρων Πηνελόπεια
κεῖτ’ ἄρ’ ἄσιτος, ἄπαστος ἐδητύος ἠδὲ ποτήτος,
ὄρμαίνουσ’ ἦ οἱ θάνατον φύγοι υἱὸς ἀμύμων,
ἦ ὅ γ’ ὑπὸ μνηστήρσιν ὑπερφιάλοισι δαμείη.
ὄσσα δὲ μερμήριξε λέων ἀνδρῶν ἐν ὀμίλῳ
δείσας, ὀππότε μιν δόλιον περὶ κύκλον ἄγωσι,
τόσσα μιν ὄρμαίνουσσαν ἐπήλυθε νήδυμος ὕπνος. (4.787-793)

But circumspect Penelope lay there in her upper room
without food, abstaining from meat and drink,
pondering whether her blameless son would escape his death,
or whether he would be overcome by the overbearing suitors.
Such things as a lion ponders, out of fear, among a crowd of men,
whenever they draw their treacherous circle around him,
such did Penelope ponder too as sweet sleep came upon her.

This is the only time in the Homeric epics that a lion simile is used to describe a woman,⁸⁷ and while its primary function is to illustrate the degree of Penelope’s anxious deliberations

⁸⁶ On the suitors as tragic characters who cannot see their inevitable fall, see Allen (1939).

⁸⁷ De Jong (2001) *ad* 787-790.

(ὄρμαίνουσα, 789 = μερμήριξε, 791), it also vividly depicts her feelings of helplessness and vulnerability because of the suitors and their plan to ambush Telemachus. She feels trapped and isolated within her own home because the suitors and Telemachus have both attempted to undermine her control of the household and of information within it. Daniel Turkeltaub (2015) has recently argued that this final appearance of Penelope before Odysseus' return to Ithaca in Book 13 raises doubts about Penelope's ability to hold off the suitors through cunning, as she had before with the trick of the shroud.⁸⁸ He challenges the predominant scholarly view of the simile, which suggests that the comparison of Penelope to a lion emphasizes her strength and endurance and calls attention to her like-mindedness with Odysseus, whom Penelope calls "lion-hearted" (θυμολέων, 4.724-726 = 4.814-816) in the narrative frame.⁸⁹ I partially agree with Turkeltaub's analysis, but would add that the narrative leaves Penelope at a climactic moment of extreme despair, which the lion simile and her collapse into sleep vividly dramatize.⁹⁰ This cliff-hanger leaves the audience in suspense about what will happen on Ithaca as the narrative shifts to

⁸⁸ On Penelope's shroud trick and her cunning, see Lowenstam (2000).

⁸⁹ For the view that the lion represents Penelope's courage, strength, and endurance and that the comparison foreshadows her victory, see Fenik (1968) 24, Scott (1974) 58-62, 121-123, Moulton (1977) 139-141, Friedrich (1981), Schnapp-Gourbeillon (1981) 38-63, and Magrath (1982). For a view of lions that emphasizes their aggression, bestiality, and lack of self-restraint, see Fränkel (1921) 69-70 and Lonsdale (1990) 35, among others. Most recently, Pache (2014) emphasizes the ferocious vengeance of Odysseus, as described by two lion similes (4.332-340, 22.401-406): "While Penelope does not experience combat, through the lion simile she is associated with Odysseus' brutal slaughter of the suitors and by extension with the many Iliadic lion similes depicting men in combat. The lion simile thus gives us an ancient Lioness, a woman thrust into the 'treacherous circle' of battle." See also Foley (1978) 10: "Penelope [...] has come remarkably close to enacting the role of a besieged warrior."

⁹⁰ Turkeltaub (2015) offers a more negative reading of Penelope's collapse into sleep. He argues that the language of the simile indicates that she has given up the fight and will be trapped by the hunters/suitors. In contrast to Turkeltaub's negative reading of the outcome of this simile, Scott (2009) 280 argues, "when the poet suppresses any suggestion that the lion is killed or the lion is triumphant, he leaves his audience to imagine the continuation with enhanced respect for the capabilities and resourcefulness of Penelope."

Odysseus' travels.⁹¹ Nonetheless, when the narrative returns to Penelope and Ithaca, the audience discovers that Penelope has not yet been trapped by the suitors – a conclusion that the simile leaves in suspense – but rather continues to turn over in her mind plans for regaining control and preventing the suitors' ambush.

Penelope before the suitors

In Book 16, Penelope attempts to regain control by exposing her knowledge of the suitors' plots and appealing to their shame and concern for reputation.⁹² As in Book 1, she appears before the suitors with her handmaids at her side, and pulls a veil in front of her face (16.413-416), but this time she addresses the suitors directly. She picks out Antinous, in particular, as the ring-leader of the suitors:

“Ἄντινο’, ὕβριν ἔχων, κακομήχανε, καὶ δέ σέ φασιν
ἐν δήμῳ Ἰθάκης μεθ’ ὀμήλικας ἔμμεν ἄριστον
βουλήν καὶ μύθοισι· σὺ δ’ οὐκ ἄρα τοῖος ἔησθα.
μάργε, τίη δὲ σὺ Τηλεμάχῳ θάνατόν τε μόρον τε
ῥάπτεις, οὐδ’ ἰκέτας ἐμπάζεαι, οἷσιν ἄρα Ζεὺς
μάρτυρος; οὐδ’ ὅσῃ κακὰ ῥάπτειν ἀλλήλοισιν.” (16.418-423)

“Antinous, you violent man, plotting evil, even though they say
that you are the most excellent in counsel and in speech among your peers
in the land of Ithaca. But you aren't like this at all.
Madman, why do you plot Telemachus' death and doom,
and fail to care for suppliants, for whom Zeus
is witness? It is sacrilege to weave evils for one other.”

Penelope contrasts what she now knows about Antinous' true character with the positive reputation he enjoys among the townspeople in Ithaca. By revealing that she knows about the plot against her son's life, she threatens Antinous' public reputation.

⁹¹ On Penelope as “the source of suspense in the *Odyssey*,” see Felson-Rubin (1994) 67.

⁹² As in Book 4, Medon has conveyed the news about the suitors' new plot against Telemachus. The rapid narrative shift between the scene of plotting and Penelope's rebuke again highlights her access to information and near-omniscience about plots relating to her family and household.

Moreover, she places at the center of her speech an anecdote about Odysseus and

Antinous' father, which compares Antinous unfavorably with Odysseus:

“ἢ οὐκ οἶσθ' ὅτε δεῦρο πατήρ τεός ἵκετο φεύγων,
δῆμον ὑποδείσας; δὴ γὰρ κεχολώατο λίην,
οὔνεκα ληϊστήρσιν ἐπισπόμενος Ταφίοισιν
ἤκαχε Θεσπρωτούς· οἱ δ' ἡμῖν ἄρθμοι ἦσαν.
τόν ῥ' ἔθελον φθίσαι καὶ ἀπορραΐσαι φίλον ἦτορ
ἠδὲ κατὰ ζωὴν φαγέειν μενοεικέα πολλήν·
ἀλλ' Ὀδυσσεὺς κατέρυκε καὶ ἔσχεθεν ἱεμένους περ.
τοῦ νῦν οἶκον ἄτιμον ἔδεις, μνάα δὲ γυναῖκα
παῖδά τ' ἀποκτείνεις, ἐμὲ δὲ μέγਾਲως ἀκαχίζεις·
ἀλλὰ σε παύσασθαι κέλομαι καὶ ἀνωγέμεν ἄλλους.” (16.424-433)

“Don't you know of the time when your father came here in exile,
afraid of the people? For they were really angry with him,
since he had joined with the Taphian pirates
and caused problems for the Thesprotians, who were allied with us.
They wanted to destroy him and take away his heart
and consume his great and abundant property.
But Odysseus held them back and restrained them, though they were eager.
That man's house you now consume without repayment, and woo his wife,
and try to kill his child, and cause me great distress.
I command you to stop and to order the others to stop.”

Penelope uses this anecdote to shame Antinous and to increase her own authority. She points to his apparent lack of knowledge (ἢ οὐκ οἶσθα, 424), which contrasts with her superior knowledge of both the past (his family history) and the present (their plot). Her story also warns Antinous through analogy with his father; as his father did, Antinous plots against people he shouldn't plot against and is caught. Penelope lingers on the punishment threatened by the people to suggest that Antinous deserves the same punishment. Indeed, death and the consumption of his property would offer direct requital for the offenses against Penelope, which she lists in juxtaposition with the punishment threatened against Antinous' father (428-432).

Although Penelope does not have the strength of the *demos* on her side,⁹³ she threatens Antinous as if through their authority and concludes her speech by commanding Antinous (κέλομαι, 433) to stop participating in the activities that threaten her household: eating, wooing, and plotting her son's death.

Penelope's appeal to her knowledge and memory as a source of authority fails, however, because it is countered by Eurymachus' lies, as he uses one of his own memories of Odysseus to boost his authority and answer Penelope's anecdote. He claims that he will protect Telemachus with his own life since Odysseus used to set him on his knees and feed him meat and wine (16.442-444). By demonstrating how Odysseus used to feed him when he was a child, he puts forward a precedent for the suitors' feasting, which Penelope had also criticized. He shows, in his hypocritical fashion,⁹⁴ that memories of the same man can be used to support either side.

Eurymachus' lies do not, however, pacify Penelope's concerns about Telemachus' safety. In Book 18, when Athena inspires Penelope to show herself to the suitors, Penelope dismisses the impulse as irrational, but decides to take the opportunity anyway to warn her son, as she explains to Eurynome:⁹⁵

“Εὐρυνόμη, θυμός μοι ἐέλδεται, οὐ τι πάρος γε,
μνηστήρεσσι φανήναι, ἀπεχθομένοισι περ ἔμπης·
παιδὶ δέ κεν εἴποιμι ἔπος, τό κε κέρδιον εἶη,
μὴ πάντα μνηστήρσιν ὑπερφιάλουσιν ὀμιλεῖν,
οἷ τ' εὖ μὲν βάζουσι, κακῶς δ' ὄπιθεν φρονέουσι.” (18.164-168)

“Eurynome, my heart desires, as never before,
to show myself to the suitors, though they are hateful for sure.

⁹³ Finley (1954) 108 notes that the *dēmos* takes a passive role in the struggle between the suitors, Penelope, and Telemachus. On the social landscape of Ithaca, see also Halverson (1985).

⁹⁴ De Jong (2001) *ad* 434-447 remarks that Eurymachus “is the more diplomatic, indeed hypocritical, of the two ring-leaders.”

⁹⁵ My interpretation of this scene follows Hölscher (1967b). For similar views, see Vester (1968) 430-432, Erbse (1972) 80-90, Fenik (1974) 116-120, and Byre (1988).

But I might say a word to my son that would be profitable,
that he should not spend all his time with the overbearing suitors,
who speak well, but have evil in mind for the future.”

Penelope shows that in her dealings with the suitors, whatever other purposes Athena has,⁹⁶ Telemachus’ well-being is most important. Eurynome, however, subtly reminds Penelope in her response that she should, at some point, make the decision to remarry, because Telemachus is now grown up (18.170-176). Penelope resists Eurynome’s advice to dry her tears and make herself look beautiful for the suitors as a sign that she remains faithful to Odysseus, despite her strange desire to appear before the suitors.

After Athena forces sleep and beauty upon Penelope, she wakes up knowing that she needs a different tactic, though she would prefer death from Artemis to marriage to one of the suitors (18.201-205). Penelope’s concern for the social and economic welfare of her household, however, along with Telemachus’ well-being, remains foremost in her interactions with the suitors, even as she begins to accept that remarriage may be the best way to prevent greater harm. In her conversation with Telemachus, she attempts to defend against the social offenses of the suitors by rebuking him for allowing a guest in her house, the disguised Odysseus, to be mistreated by the suitors (18.221-225). And, while Athena’s hand guides her, Penelope welcomes the suitors’ gifts as a way of eliciting some economic reciprocity from them (18.276-280). Following Uvo Hölscher (1967b), I understand Odysseus’ happy reaction because “her mind was set on other things” (νόος δέ οἱ ἄλλα μενοίνα, 18.283) to mean that Odysseus

⁹⁶ Athena wants Penelope to appear before the suitors “so that she might be honored more by her husband and son than she was previously” (ὅπως [...] τιμήσσεια γένοιτο / μᾶλλον πρὸς πόσιός τε καὶ υἱέος ἢ πάρος ἦεν, 18.160-162). Penelope’s extensive beautification by Athena (18.190-196) is occasioned more by her husband’s presence than by the suitors’.

understands that Penelope nonetheless wants something else besides remarriage: the return of her husband.⁹⁷

Testing each other

Odysseus is the only other character in the poem who understands what Penelope's *kleos* as waiting wife entails, that it is not a passive waiting, but an active waiting, with multiple, sometimes conflicting, responsibilities that require her to put her personal traits of fidelity, endurance, restraint, and cunning to practice. By contrast, in Book 2 Antinous associates her fame with her good sense and loyalty to Odysseus, and points out that her weaving trick creates *kleos* for her and loss for Telemachus, because the suitors will continue to consume his property:

“εἰ δ’ ἔτ’ ἀνιήσει γε πολὺν χρόνον υἱᾶς Ἀχαιῶν,
τὰ φρονέουσ’ ἀνὰ θυμὸν ἅ οἱ πέρι δῶκεν Ἀθήνη,
ἔργα τ’ ἐπίστασθαι περικαλλέα καὶ φρένας ἐσθλὰς
κέρδεά θ’, οἳ’ οὐ πῶ τιν’ ἀκούομεν οὐδὲ παλαιῶν,
τάων αἰ πάρος ἦσαν εὐπλοκαμίδες Ἀχαιαί,
Τυρῶ τ’ Ἀλκμήνη τε εὐστέφανός τε Μυκῆνη·
τάων οὐ τις ὁμοία νοήματα Πηνελοπείη
ἤδη· ἀτὰρ μὲν τοῦτό γ’ ἐναίσιμον οὐκ ἐνόησε.
τόφρα γὰρ οὖν βίότον τε τεδὸν καὶ κτήματ’ ἔδονται,
ῥόφρα κε κείνη τοῦτον ἔχη νόον, ὃν τινὰ οἱ νῦν
ἐν στήθεσσι τιθείσι θεοί. μέγα μὲν κλέος αὐτῇ
ποιεῖτ’, αὐτὰρ σοί γε ποθὴν πολέος βιότοιο.” (2.115-126)

“But if she will continue to vex the sons of the Achaeans for a long time, having her mind set upon the things which Athena gave her, knowledge of beautiful craftsmanship, and good sense, and cleverness, such as none of the women of old have a reputation for, among whom were those fair-haired Achaean women of previous times, Tyro and Alceme and Mycene with her fair crown. Not one of them knew tactics similar to Penelope's, though this one thing she did not devise justly. For they will consume your livelihood and property for as long as she has this intention, which the gods now place in her heart. She wins for herself great fame, but, in your case, distress for your abundant property.”

⁹⁷ See also Emlyn-Jones (1984) 11.

Antinous stresses what is in Penelope's mind (τὰ φρονέουσ' ἀνὰ θυμόν, 116): her knowledge of handiwork (ἔργα τ' ἐπίστασθαι περικαλλέα, 117), her good sense (φρένας ἐσθλάς, 117), and cunning (κέρδεα, 118). According to Antinous, Penelope's great reputation is related to these qualities of good sense and cunning, which the gods have granted her. He fails to realize that it is Penelope's capacity for governance and decision-making that, in her mind, wins her a reputation equal to Odysseus'.⁹⁸

Penelope's appearance in Book 18 is the first time that Odysseus, in disguise as a beggar, sees his wife. Her intervention, in which she rebukes Telemachus for the suitors' treatment of beggar-Odysseus and receives gifts from the suitors, shows Odysseus that she has attempted to manage the social and economic demands on his household, at the same time that she maintains her loyalty to him and their son.⁹⁹ As a result, when beggar-Odysseus finally sits down with Penelope to have a private conversation in Book 19, he praises her successful management of the household:

“ὦ γύναι, οὐκ ἄν τις σε βροτῶν ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαίαν
νεικέοι· ἦ γὰρ σευ κλέος οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἰκάνει,
ὥς τέ τευ ἠ βασιλῆος ἀμύμονος, ὅς τε θεουδῆς
ἀνδράσιν ἐν πολλοῖσι καὶ ἰφθίμοισιν ἀνάσσω
εὐδικίας ἀνέχησι, φέροισι δὲ γαῖα μέλαινα
πυροὺς καὶ κριθάς, βρίθησι δὲ δένδρεα καρπῶ,
τίκτη δ' ἔμπεδα μήλα, θάλασσα δὲ παρέχη ἰχθῦς
ἐξ εὐηγεσίης, ἀρετῶσι δὲ λαοὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ.” (19.107-114)

“Woman, no mortal upon the boundless earth could criticize
you, for your fame truly reaches wide heaven,
like the fame of some blameless king, who, fearing the gods

⁹⁸ Other characters cite Penelope's constant weeping as an indication of her fidelity (cf. Anticleia to Odysseus at 11.181-183 and Eumaeus to Telemachus at 16.37-39). Penelope's constancy is part of the picture, but is not the whole picture, as Odysseus alone recognizes.

⁹⁹ She does this, moreover, apparently unaware that Odysseus is in the room, which proves the authenticity of her actions and feelings.

and ruling over many powerful men,
maintains good governance, and the black earth bears
wheat and barley, and the trees are heavy with fruit,
and the flocks give birth constantly, and the sea produces fish
because of his good leadership, and the people prosper under him.”

Odysseus’ comparison is perfectly crafted to assuage Penelope’s anxieties and concerns.¹⁰⁰ He indirectly praises her for ruling the household justly, maintaining its abundance, and allowing the people associated with it, such as Telemachus, to prosper.¹⁰¹ Odysseus understands that, to Penelope, *kleos* is directly linked with good governance of the household.

This simile is also a delaying tactic for Odysseus: he gains Penelope’s trust by understanding her concerns, while navigating away from questions about his identity and past.¹⁰² Penelope responds to Odysseus’ praise with a list of her anxieties, the crisis that she perceives as a challenge to her authority and success within the household: she is burdened by the suitors, who are exhausting the resources of the house; she cannot pay attention to visitors because she is constantly grieving for Odysseus; and she is forced to make the difficult decision about whether

¹⁰⁰ Amory (1963) argues that Odysseus’ prolonged recourting of Penelope begins with this simile of the just king and ends with the reverse simile in Book 23. She points out that this prolonged recourting is necessary because of Penelope’s psychological reluctance to accept Odysseus, born from her skeptical outlook, vigilance against deception, and pausing of her own sexuality. Martin (1989) 22-42 views this simile and the conversation that follows as a challenge of praise, similar to the *neikos*, a verbal duel between Iliadic warriors. He misses the subtle courting gestures that Amory picks up on.

¹⁰¹ Murnaghan (1987) 44 argues that beggar-Odysseus implies, with this compliment, that Penelope has fully replaced Odysseus. Foley (1978) 11 points out the limits of Penelope’s ability to perform kingly functions: “For all her feminine intelligence in maintaining the material conditions for the survival of Odysseus’ household, and thus for his kingship, and even in performing such kingly functions as mediating the quarrels of the restless young, Penelope, because she lacks physical force, can only stop change on Ithaca. She cannot restore it to full social growth.” Levaniouk (2011) 260 argues that the renegotiation of positions within the household begins with this simile: “Penelope has been self-sufficient for twenty years, but she claims to be in need of her husband’s management. Her unusual independence is presented as a misfortune, which only detracts from her *kleos*. Thus begins the mutual renegotiation of their positions between Odysseus and Penelope, the re-establishment of their famous *homophrosune*.”

¹⁰² Others believe that by answering Penelope’s questions about his identity with this simile about kingship, Odysseus hints at his true identity. See, for example, Foley (1978) 11.

to remarry or not, especially since Telemachus is now ready to take care of the household himself: ἀσχαλάα δὲ παῖς βίον κατεδόντων, / γινώσκων· ἤδη γὰρ ἀνὴρ οἶός τε μάλιστα / οἴκου κήδεσθαι, τῷ τε Ζεὺς κῦδος ὀπάζει (“my son is distressed that they are consuming his livelihood, as he recognizes; for he is already a man, and is able to take care of a household to which Zeus grants glory,” 19.159-161). Books 18 and 19 flag Penelope’s growing awareness of Telemachus’ status as an ἀνὴρ (160), no longer the παῖς (159) she thought he was in Books 1 and 4. This knowledge makes her decision all the more pressing.

Penelope shares her anxieties with the beggar, but asks in turn that he share his own story. He stresses the pain that telling his story brings, thereby explaining his reluctance to tell it, and providing another reason why Penelope should trust him: they both have stories that are full of hardship and sorrow. The beggar’s story is not a personal story of hardship, however, but rather an account of an encounter he had with Odysseus. The mere mention of Odysseus causes Penelope to melt with tears (19.203-209). Her candid display of emotion in front of the beggar contrasts with her previous public appearances, in which she mentioned her grief and even permitted tears but did not give into them as fully as the simile implies she does here, without restraint, like melting snow (19.203-209).¹⁰³ Her willingness to share her grief with the stranger, a grief that has so thoroughly isolated her up to this point, gives proof of the growing trust between them, and initiates the slow process by which Penelope’s isolation and grief begin to melt.

¹⁰³ Mueller (2007) 348 writes, “The *Odyssey* plays on the idea of Penelope as alternately melting in tears and ‘harder than stone,’ a criticism that both Odysseus and Telemakhos level at her because of her refusal to recognize the stranger as Odysseus.”

Nonetheless, cautious Penelope is not content with the beggar's mere mention of Odysseus. She tests the truth of his story by asking specific questions about Odysseus' clothing, his character, and his comrades (19.215-219). Her caution springs from another anxiety that was prefigured earlier in beggar-Odysseus' interactions with Eumaeus (14.122-132): Penelope is terrified of being tricked by false information into believing something untrue about Odysseus and his return. This fear relates to her fear of losing control of communication in the household; she depends upon the reports of others to make major decisions about her life and household, and so the validation of the information she receives is of the utmost importance. This fear of deception becomes an important *topos* for the concerns of waiting wives in tragedy, who also have limited knowledge about their husbands' returns.¹⁰⁴

When the beggar passes this test, Penelope weeps this time because she recognizes her husband in the beggar's story, and she rewards the beggar's truthfulness with higher status in her household: νῦν μὲν δὴ μοι, ξεῖνε, πάρος περ ἐὼν ἐλεεινός, / ἐν μεγάροισιν ἐμοῖσι φίλος τ' ἔση αἰδοῖός τε ("Though before I pitied you, stranger, now indeed you will be loved and respected in my halls," 19.253-254). True information about her husband's previous whereabouts is valuable to her, but Penelope continues to express skepticism about Odysseus' survival and return. Beggar-Odysseus attempts to give Penelope hope by reporting a rumor he heard about Odysseus' return, but this grade of information, at one remove from direct experience and unable to be subjected to tests, is not convincing to Penelope. She trusts verifiable information and reason more:

“αἰὲν γὰρ τοῦτο, ξεῖνε, ἔπος τετελεσμένον εἴη·
τῷ κε τάχα γνοίης φιλότητά τε πολλά τε δῶρα
ἐξ ἐμεῦ, ὡς ἂν τίς σε συναντόμενος μακαρίζοι.

¹⁰⁴ See the discussions of this *topos* in Chapters 3 and 4.

ἀλλά μοι ὦδ' ἀνὰ θυμὸν οἴεται, ὡς ἔσεται περ·
οὔτ' Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔτι οἶκον ἐλεύσεται.” (19.309-313)

“Stranger, I wish that this report may be fulfilled.
Then you would quickly receive affection and many gifts
from me, so that whoever would meet you would call you blessed.
But this is how it seems to me, in my heart, and so it will probably be:
Odysseus will not return home any longer.”

Penelope’s desire for the stranger’s report to be true is precisely what prevents her from believing it, until it can be confirmed, at least, by some proof. She understands the power that wishes have to affect judgment and to mislead the mind.

Penelope returns to the topic of the untrustworthiness of one’s deepest desires after beggar-Odysseus has been bathed and recognized by Eurycleia. She strikes up a conversation with the beggar before he goes off to bed about the difficulties she has with sleep, which offers no respite to her mourning.¹⁰⁵ Sleep is difficult, she claims, because she cannot stop thinking about the difficult decision she will soon have to make. She describes her cognitive process with a simile:

“ὡς δ' ὅτε Πανδαρέου κόρη, γλωρηῖς ἀηδῶν,
καλὸν ἀεΐδησιν ἔαρος νέον ἰσταμένοιο,
δενδρέων ἐν πετάλοισι καθεζομένη πυκνοῖσιν,
ἢ τε θαμὰ τρωπῶσα χέει πολυχηέα φωνήν,
παῖδ' ὀλοφυρομένη Ἴτυλον φίλον, ὃν ποτε χαλκῷ
κτεῖνε δι' ἀφραδίας, κούρον Ζήθιοιο ἀνακτος,
ὡς καὶ ἐμοὶ δίχα θυμὸς ὀρώρεται ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα,
ἢ ἐ μένω παρὰ παιδὶ καὶ ἔμπεδα πάντα φυλάσσω,
κτῆσιν ἐμήν, δμῶάς τε καὶ ὑψερεφές μέγα δῶμα,
εὐνήν τ' αἰδομένη πόσιος δήμοιό τε φῆμιν,
ἢ ἤδη ἄμ' ἔπωμαι Ἀχαιῶν ὅς τις ἄριστος
μνάται ἐνὶ μεγάροισι, πορῶν ἀπερείσια ἔδνα. (19.518-529)

¹⁰⁵ Waiting wives in tragedy also complain about disrupted sleep. Cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 887-894, Soph. *Trach.* 27-30, 103-111, 175-177, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. On Penelope’s sleeping habits, see Carson (2005) 29: “Sleep is the deepest contract she shares with her husband. Miles apart, years apart, consciously and unconsciously, they turn the key of each other.”

“As when the daughter of Pandareus, nightingale of the greenwood,
sings beautifully, when spring has just arrived,
sitting in the close-set leaves of the trees,
and she, trilling her notes often, pours out her resounding voice
in mourning for her dear son, Itylus, whom she killed with a sword
one day unwittingly, the son of king Zethus.
So too does my heart, split in two, vacillate here and there
about whether I should remain beside my son and keep all things in their place,
my possessions, and my slaves, and the big, high-roofed house,
respecting the bed of my husband and the voice of the people,
or whether I should go now with whichever Achaean is best who
woos me in my halls and provides countless bride-gifts.”

The primary function of this simile, as de Jong (2001, *ad* 518-529) notes, is to depict both Penelope’s constant weeping¹⁰⁶ and the vacillations of her mind as she faces this difficult decision.¹⁰⁷ Yet on a secondary level, this simile also demonstrates Penelope’s anxieties about unwittingly harming her son by making an uninformed decision, just as the daughter of Pandareus unwittingly (δι’ ἀφραδίας, 523) killed her son Itylus and constantly voices her regret

¹⁰⁶ Levaniouk (1999) argues that Penelope’s name also signals a link with the nightingale: the *penelops* was a small water bird associated with other birds of lament such as the nightingale and the halcyon. For connections between this name and the goose dream that follows, see Pratt (1994) 151. Others, from Eustathius to Felson-Rubin (1987) 63-64 and Peradotto (1990) 107-108, make a connection with πῆνη, “woof” or “spool,” referring to Penelope’s characteristic activity of weaving.

¹⁰⁷ Most scholars follow the Procne and Philomela version of the myth, made canonical by Greek tragedy, Ovid, and Apollodorus in interpreting this simile. I follow the second version of the myth, given by the scholia and Eustathius (V1, V2, B2 scholia to *Odyssey* 19.518; Pherecydes *FGrHist* 3 F124). For this version, in which Aedon, who is married to Zethus and has only one son, Itylus, becomes jealous of her sister-in-law, Niobe, and attempts to kill her eldest son, but makes a mistake in the darkness and kills her own son, see Levaniouk (2008) 7-8. Scholars who follow the first version interpret Penelope’s *aphradia* as madness or folly. See, for example, Austin (1975) 229, McDonald (1997) 9, Russo (1992) 100, and Katz (1991) 145. Following this version, Ahl and Roisman (1996) 235 suggest that the simile indicates suspicion or even subconscious hostility towards Odysseus (who would correspond to the Tereus figure of the myth). Others, including Austin (1975) 228-229, Papadopoulou-Belmehdi (1994) 137-160, Katz (1991) 128-154, 54, 80, 85, and Russo (1992) 100, see Aedon as a Clytemnestra figure, who breaks from her husband and consequently also from her offspring (Itylus = Orestes). Anhalt (2001) 155-156 argues that Penelope’s reference to Aedon “may reveal apprehensions concerning Odysseus’ actions during his absence and uncertainty about the constancy of his attachment to herself.” Scholars who follow the second, Theban version of the myth interpret δι’ ἀφραδίας as “by mistake” or “unwittingly.” See, for example, Stanford (1996) *ad* 19.518, Felson-Rubin (1994) 31, and Rutherford (1992) 192. For other discussions of this simile, see Marquardt (1985) 40 and Nagy (1996) 7-58.

in a mourning song. Penelope is trying to decide which action will prove least harmful to her son, but she is afraid that she will make the wrong decision because of lack of information and end up even more like the constantly mourning nightingale.¹⁰⁸

The same fear is reiterated in a different form in Penelope's account and interpretation of a strange dream to beggar-Odysseus. In the dream, which she asks beggar-Odysseus to interpret, Penelope has twenty geese in her house, which she feeds and enjoys watching (19.536-537). As she watches, however, an eagle descends from the mountains and breaks all of the geese's necks, leaving them strewn about the halls of the house (19.538-540). Penelope is extremely distressed by the deaths of the geese, and she weeps and mourns for them with a crowd of Achaean women (19.541-543). Suddenly, however, the eagle returns and speaks to her with the voice of a man, offering a consolatory interpretation of the dream:

‘θάρσει, Ἰκαρίου κόρη τηλεκλειτοῖο·
οὐκ ὄναρ, ἀλλ’ ὕπαρ ἐσθλόν, ὃ τοι τετελεσμένον ἔσται.
χῆνες μὲν μνηστῆρες, ἐγὼ δέ τοι αἰετὸς ὄρνις
ἦα πάρος, νῦν αὖτε τεὸς πόσις εἰλήλουθα,
ὃς πᾶσι μνηστῆρσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφήσω.’ (19.546-550)

‘Have heart, daughter of far-famed Icarus.
This is not a dream, but a good waking vision, which, to be sure, will be fulfilled.
For the geese are the suitors, and I, who before was the eagle,
have now returned again as your husband,
who will let loose a terrible fate upon all the suitors.’

The initial scenario of the dream, before the return of the eagle, represents Penelope's fears about mismanagement of her household, which leads to the deaths of the creatures she cares for

¹⁰⁸ My interpretation follows in some, but not all respects that of Levaniouk (2008).

there.¹⁰⁹ This initial interpretation, which is confirmed by Penelope's terrible grief at the deaths of the birds,¹¹⁰ is reinterpreted by Odysseus the eagle as predicting Odysseus' return.¹¹¹

Since Odysseus is in fact in the house and preparing to exact revenge upon the suitors, scholars have often privileged Odysseus' reinterpretation of the dream over Penelope's initial interpretation of the dream.¹¹² Some have even claimed that Penelope's grief over the geese indicates her subconscious or secret desire to care for and protect the suitors.¹¹³ This reading, however, contradicts everything that Penelope has said and done up to this point, and makes little sense in context. By contrast, throughout this book and the entire poem Penelope has stated her

¹⁰⁹ A simile describing Odysseus' desire to defend his household from the suitors compares his heart to a dog growling to protect her young puppies (20.14-16). Penelope's dream involves a similar idea: the desire to protect her pets, which represent the household and its inhabitants, though in this case Penelope feels grief at not having protected them sufficiently. In a somewhat different interpretation, Pratt (1994) argues that the twenty geese represent Penelope's twenty years of waiting. The eagle's attack represents Odysseus' death, which brings an end to these twenty years of waiting: "Penelope's tears signal to the Homeric audience that for her the twenty geese initially represent twenty years of faithful waiting for her husband, twenty years in which she takes a certain pride (ἰαίνομαι), twenty years wasted, destroyed by the eagles sent by Zeus" (Pratt 1994, 151). Pratt (1994) 151-152 points out that geese were believed to be good guardians of the house (cf. Ar. *HA* 488b20, Antip. Sid. 7.425.7). Finley (1978) 247 argues, similarly, that the geese signify the "state of half-orderliness" Penelope maintained. Amory (1963) 106 and Allione (1963) 90-91 interpret the dream as a form of divination through bird signs.

¹¹⁰ The intensity of Penelope's grief is signaled by the language of morning (ἐκώκυον, 19.541, cf. 2.362; οἴκτω' ὀλυφουρομένη 19.543, cf. 4.719) and the action of the Achaean women, who gather around her (19.542). Penelope mourns for the geese as she did for her son in Book 4, when she learned of the suitors' plot and Telemachus' departure.

¹¹¹ Levaniouk (2008) 22 writes that "[t]he shift in the symbolism of the geese is supported by the distinction drawn between ὄναρ and ὕπαρ and by the explicit now-then contrast in the eagle's speech."

¹¹² See, for example, Katz (1991) 146 and Rozokoki (2001) 2, n. 6.

¹¹³ For Penelope's secret affection for the suitors, see Austin (1975) 229-231, Katz (1991) 146-147, Felson-Rubin (1994) 32, Ahl and Roisman (1996) 235-236, McDonald (1997) 16. For her subconscious attachment to them, see Devereux (1957) 382, Rankin (1962) 622, Russo (1982) 8-10 and (1992) 102, Murnaghan (1987) 130, Felson-Rubin (1987) 71-74. For objections to this "Freudian" reading of the dream, see Kessels (1978) 91-98, Winkler (1990a) 23-43, Price (1990) 365-387, and Pratt (1994) 148-149. On the dream as a fictional creation of Penelope to test Odysseus, see Büchner (1940) 149, n. 1, Harsh (1950) 16, and Winkler (1990a) 154.

fears about the potentially fatal consequences of her mismanagement of the household and the suitors' behavior in her halls.

The reinterpretation of the dream vision of Odysseus does shift Penelope's understanding of the dream. From her waking perspective, the dream is a cautionary tale against trusting too much in one's deepest desires, which can be deceptive.¹¹⁴ She wants Odysseus to return so badly that her mind tries to make her believe that he will, even when other signs suggest that he will not.¹¹⁵ She is afraid that unfounded hope and attachment to the memory of Odysseus will lead her to make the wrong decision, which will result in the death of those geese: the members of her household whom she is supposed to protect, and her son in particular. She expresses her knowledge of the deceptiveness of dreams as a parable:

“δοιαὶ γὰρ τε πύλαι ἀμενηνῶν εἰσὶν ὄνειρων·
αἱ μὲν γὰρ κεράεσσι τετεύχεται, αἱ δ' ἐλέφαντι·
τῶν οἱ μὲν κ' ἔλθωσι διὰ πριστοῦ ἐλέφαντος,
οἱ ῥ' ἐλεφαίρονται, ἔπε' ἀκράαντα φέροντες·
οἱ δὲ διὰ ξεστῶν κεράων ἔλθωσι θύραζε,
οἱ ῥ' ἔτυμα κραίνουσι, βροτῶν ὅτε κέν τις ἴδῃται.
ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ οὐκ ἐντεῦθεν οἴομαι αἰνὸν ὄνειρον
ἐλθέμεν· ἦ κ' ἀσπαστὸν ἐμοὶ καὶ παιδὶ γένοιτο.” (19.562-569)

“For the gates of shadowy dreams are two:
one is made of horn, the other of ivory.
Some dreams go through the gate of sawn ivory,
and they deceive men, bringing fruitless words.
Other dreams pass out through the gate of polished horn,
and they result in true things, when any mortal sees them.
But, in my case, I do not think that this horrible dream
came from there; truly, it would be welcome to me and my child.”

¹¹⁴ Pratt (1994) 152 concludes her essay, “That Penelope seems to doubt the interpretation of the bird-sign offered within the dream by the eagle and to fear another, less positive interpretation is typical of her skeptical and cautious approach in the final books of the *Odyssey*.”

¹¹⁵ At 20.79-90 we learn that Odysseus appears to Penelope in dreams as if he is there. There is irony in this particular instance because Odysseus is in fact in the house, but the dream and Penelope's response provide a further example of the kinds of deceptive dreams Penelope fears.

Penelope's parable, complete with etymological word-play (ἐλέφας - ἐλεφαίρομαι, κέρως - κραινω),¹¹⁶ provides a lesson and, perhaps, a challenge to the beggar, who confirms dream-Odysseus' interpretation without recognizing that it depends too much on unfounded hope.¹¹⁷ Indeed, Penelope rejects Odysseus' interpretation of the dream precisely because it would be "welcome" (ἀσπαστόν, 569) to her.

Penelope's final act of independent decision-making is to set up the contest of the bow, which she announces to the beggar after she proves her point about the dream.¹¹⁸ She decides to protect her "geese" by getting married to the winner of the contest:

“νῦν δὲ μνηστήρεσσιν ἄεθλον τοῦτον ἐφήσω·
ὃς δέ κε ῥήϊτατ' ἐντανύσῃ βιὸν ἐν παλάμῃσι
καὶ διοϊστεύσῃ πελέκεων δυοκαίδεκα πάντων,
τῷ κεν ἄμ' ἐσποίμην, νοσφισσαμένη τόδε δῶμα
κουρίδιον, μάλα καλόν, ἐνίπλειον βιότοιο,
τοῦ ποτε μεμνήσεσθαι οἴομαι ἐν περ ὄνειρῳ.” (19.576-581)

¹¹⁶ For interpretations of the parable based upon this etymological play, see Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1927) 87, Hundt (1935) 78-81, Kessels (1978) 97, 121 n. 44, Russo (1982) 4-18, Rutherford (1992) 194-195, and Pollmann (1993) 233.

¹¹⁷ Other scholars, who believe that Penelope quietly or subconsciously recognizes Odysseus in Book 19, argue that the dream and parable of the gates encode a message to Odysseus that only he can understand. Some argue that her words contain an implicit challenge to him to kill the suitors just as the eagle killed the geese in her dream. The question of early recognition has been so much discussed that it is called, simply, "the Penelope question." There is evidence that the question was already raised in antiquity (cf. Sen. *Ep.* 88.8). I find good arguments on both sides, and while I am tempted also by the idea of early recognition, I believe that the poem intentionally leaves the question open. For a summary of different views on the Penelope question and their implications for a feminist reading of the poem, see Doherty (1995) 31-63. Important players in the debate are Harsh (1950), Amory (1963) 106, Austin (1975) 206-207, Murnaghan (1986) 108, Felson-Rubin (1987), Winkler (1990a) 129-161, and Katz (1991). More recent considerations of the question include Reece (2011) and Vlahos (2011). Both DeSmidt (2006) and Haller (2009) argue that the gates of horn and ivory have significance within their narrative context (though each explains this significance slightly differently) and encode a message to Odysseus about how to act.

¹¹⁸ DeSmidt (2006) and Haller (2009) argue that the gate of horn represents the bow, which is made from horn. Haller (2009) 404 explains, "Horn represents the bow of Odysseus, of which horn is an essential component, and stands as a hint to Odysseus that he alone of the suitors is likely to know how to string a composite bow, and as such will (if he turns out to be who Penelope thinks he is) have an advantage in the bow contest that Penelope will soon go on to set."

“Now I will set this contest for the suitors:
whoever will most easily string the bow in his hands
and shoot an arrow through all twelve axes,
I will go with, having abandoned this house
of my marriage, which is especially fine and full of wealth,
and which I think I will remember even in my dreams.”

Penelope’s emotional language (νοσφισσαμένη, 579; κουρίδιον, 580), her praise of the house’s beauty and abundance, and her claim that she will remember it, even in dreams, emphasize her emotional attachment to the house, though she will soon, she believes, be physically absent from it.¹¹⁹ This decision, which Penelope has been delaying since Book 1, is the climactic event of Book 19. Through the *homilia* with beggar-Odysseus, which allows more insight into Penelope’s thoughts than any other part of the poem, Book 19 dramatizes Penelope’s negotiation of her tragic choice between two unfavorable options that must be made without full knowledge of the situation. Her decision to remarry is courageous and reasonable, though it is the last thing that she wants.¹²⁰ The *homilia* in Book 19 contributes to the poem’s characterization of Penelope as skeptical of potentially deceptive information, from strangers and from dreams, and her simultaneous commitment to her son and her household, which she associates with her memories of Odysseus. Through her tests, she recognizes beggar-Odysseus as a worthy confidante, but also performs her own fidelity to Odysseus and her methods for continuing in her fidelity over those twenty long years.

¹¹⁹ Mueller (2007) 347 comments, “She memorializes the house in its prime. Just as the funeral epigram celebrates the greatest achievement of a mortal life, so, too, does Penelope’s memory act as living testament to the glory of her marriage to Odysseus.”

¹²⁰ Indeed, a few lines later in Book 20, she wakes from sleep and wishes for death instead of marriage to a man who is not Odysseus (20.61-90). On her invocation in this passage of the Pandareids, see Levaniouk (2008) 25-27.

Recognition, reunion, and storytelling

Penelope's hesitancy to accept Odysseus' return in Book 23 stems from the same distrust of her own deep desires that she demonstrates in Book 19. Though her initial response to the nurse's report of Odysseus' return is to fling her arms around her nurse and weep for joy, she suppresses her emotional reaction until she has received more information, and she clings to her previous cautious assumption that Odysseus has died far away:

“μαῖα φίλη, μή πω μέγ’ ἐπεύχεο καρχαλόωσα.
οἶσθα γὰρ ὡς κ’ ἀσπαστὸς ἐνὶ μεγάροισι φανείη
πάσι, μάλιστα δ’ ἐμοί τε καὶ υἱεῖ, τὸν τεκόμεσθα·
ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὄδε μῦθος ἐτήτυμος, ὡς ἀγορεύεις,
ἀλλὰ τις ἀθανάτων κτείνει μνηστήρας ἀγανούς,
ὔβριν ἀγασσάμενος θυμαλγέα καὶ κακὰ ἔργα.
οὐ τινα γὰρ τίεσκον ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων,
οὐ κακὸν οὐδὲ μὲν ἐσθλόν, ὅτις σφέας εἰσαφίκοιτο·
τῷ δι’ ἀτασθαλίας ἔπαθον κακόν· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
ᾤλεσε τηλοῦ νόστον Ἀχαιίδος, ᾤλετο δ’ αὐτός.” (23.59-68)

“Dear nurse, do not yet boast loudly in exultation.
For you know how welcome a sight he would be in the halls
to all, but especially to me and my son, whom we bore.
But this is not a reliable speech, as you tell it;
instead, one of the immortals killed the lordly suitors,
offended by their painful violence and evil deeds.
For they did not respect any mortal man,
whether bad or good, who approached them.
Therefore, because of their arrogance, they have suffered evil. But Odysseus
lost his homecoming far from Achaea, and has perished.”

Penelope questions the reliability of the nurse's story precisely because it is the outcome that she has been hoping for. In order to show that appearances can deceive, she constructs an alternative interpretation of what the nurse heard and saw: it was not Odysseus who killed the suitors, but some god, who came to punish them for their offenses against social decorum and morality (23.63-64). Penelope is not willing to accept a story, or someone else's experience, without first

seeing and interrogating the source. Consistent with her skepticism throughout the poem, she is rigorous in keeping her hope in check.

Fear of deception is also the reason that Penelope gives for her slowness to accept Odysseus once she has seen him, even after bath and beautification:

“αἰεὶ γὰρ μοι θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλοισιν
ἐρρίγει μὴ τίς με βροτῶν ἀπάφοιτο ἐπέσσειν
ἐλθῶν· πολλοὶ γὰρ κακὰ κέρδεα βουλευούσιν.” (23.215-217)

“For the heart in my chest constantly
shuddered in fear that some mortal might come and deceive me
with his words. For many men plot evil schemes.”

Penelope even takes precautions against visions sent by the gods by distrusting her own eyes, a precaution that Helen failed to take (23.218-224).¹²¹ The test of the bed also introduces another reason for Penelope’s slowness in accepting Odysseus: she wants to know whether the Odysseus who has returned to her is the same – emotionally – as the Odysseus who left. She judges him, therefore, not by his words, but by his spontaneous emotional response (ὀχθήσας, 23.182), which demonstrates his continued emotional attachment to his household, built around the bed.¹²²

Penelope’s recognition that the veteran’s physical return is not assurance enough of his

¹²¹ Many scholars have found the comparison that Penelope makes between herself and Helen, the paradigmatic unfaithful wife, odd or inappropriate. See, for example, Devereux (1957) 384, Marquardt (1985) 42, Murnaghan (1987) 141-142, Roisman (1987) 62, Katz (1991) 185, and Felson-Rubin (1994) 158 n. 62. I agree with Morgan (1991) 2 that Penelope contrasts her own caution with Helen’s deception: “Far from adducing any parallel, she contrasts herself with Helen (219-24) and thereby underlines and justifies her own exacting caution that has been necessary until this moment.” On this interpretive crux, see also Fredricksmeyer (1997).

¹²² Chaston (2002) 16 argues that “[t]he ingenuity of the bed trick is that it is not an absolute proof of either his identity or her fidelity, but requires from both husband and wife an act of mutual trust.” The emotional test is important because earlier, at 19.210-212, Odysseus restrained his emotional response to Penelope’s tears. On “the suppression of emotion as the persistence of a valid adaptation to combat,” see Mason (1990) 248 and Shay (2002) 137. Penelope is testing whether Odysseus will continue to be an “ice man.” On the expression “ice man,” see Matsakis (1996) 33.

emotional return foreshadows the dark reversal of Euripides' *Heracles*, as discussed in Chapter 5.

An important element of the successful reunion of Penelope and Odysseus is the acknowledgement that both parties experienced trauma and hardship during their separation.¹²³

The narrator of the poem expresses the similarity of their experiences in a reverse simile:

ὥς φάτο, τῷ δ' ἔτι μᾶλλον ὑφ' ἴμερον ὤρσε γόοιο·
κλαίει δ' ἔχων ἄλοχον θυμαρέα, κεδνὰ ἰδυίαν.
ὥς δ' ὅτ' ἂν **ἀσπᾶσιος** γῆ νηχομένοισι φανήη,
ὣν τε Ποσειδάων εὐεργέα νῆ' ἐνὶ πόντῳ
ῥαίσιη, ἐπειγομένην ἀνέμῳ καὶ κύματι πηγῶ·
παῦροι δ' ἐξέφυγον πολιῆς ἀλὸς ἤπειρόνδε
νηχόμενοι, πολλὴ δὲ περὶ χροῖ τέτροφεν ἄλμη,
ἀσπᾶσιοι δ' ἐπέβαν γαίης, κακότητα φυγόντες·
ὥς ἄρα τῇ **ἀσπαστὸς** ἦν πόσις εἰσοροῶση,
δειρῆς δ' οὐ πῶ πάμπαν ἀφίετο πῆγεε λευκῶ. (23.231-240)

So he spoke, and longing for weeping rose up still more from within him.
And he wept as he held his trustworthy wife, whose heart fits his.
As when **welcome** land appears to swimmers
whose well-built ship Poseidon shatters on the sea,
as it is overpowered by wind and solid wave,
and few escaped from the grey sea to the shore
by swimming, and a crust of brine has grown upon their skin,
and **gladly** they set foot on land, having escaped doom;
so was her husband a **welcome** sight to her as she gazed upon him,
and she did not yet loosen her white arms from his neck at all.

This simile compares Penelope to shipwrecked sailors who finally gain sight of land, and Odysseus to the welcome, life-saving land. The syntax, however, encourages the reader to identify the sailors with Odysseus at first, since Penelope is not mentioned in the sentence preceding the comparison. The cap of the simile, therefore, comes as a surprise, as the reader realizes that Penelope, not Odysseus, is being compared to the sailors. The syntax and role-

¹²³ On the couple's mutual acknowledgement that they are both survivors, see Chaston (2002) 16.

reversal work together to emphasize the *homophrosyne* of Penelope and Odysseus, their likeness to one another (cf. θυμαρέα, 232).¹²⁴ More precisely, the simile shows that Penelope has suffered trauma at home in Odysseus' absence, just as Odysseus has experienced trauma at war and on his journey home. The recognition of their shared trauma, which is so neatly distilled in this simile, allows Penelope and Odysseus to overcome their separation and to recognize and understand one another at last.

The language of the simile also caps the narrative of Penelope's skepticism by repeating a word that figured prominently in her expressions of pessimism about Odysseus' return:

ἀσπάσιος/ἀσπαστός.¹²⁵ This word occurs three times in the simile, emphasizing the relief of the sailor as he *gladly* sees the *welcome* shore (232, 238, 239).¹²⁶ In Book 19, Penelope expresses her skepticism about Odysseus' return as a contrafactual: Odysseus won't come home, but if he did, he would be a welcome (ἀσπαστόν, 19.569) sight to me and my son. In fact, Penelope's desire for his return, how welcome he would be, fueled her skepticism, as she understood how easy it is to be deluded by hope. The simile, therefore, brings an end to the narrative of Penelope's fear and skepticism by repeating her language as a reality rather than as a contrafactual.¹²⁷ The comparison also recalls, and brings closure to, Penelope's repeated wishes for death (cf. 18.201-

¹²⁴ This interpretation is common. See, for example, Podlecki (1971) 90, Arthur (1973) 15-16, and Foley (1978) 17.

¹²⁵ For an analysis of the ἀσπάσιος word-group throughout the poem, see Taaffe (1990).

¹²⁶ A similar emphasis on the welcome sight of a loved one, compared with the welcome sight of shore for a shipwrecked sailor, occurs in Book 5.394-399, but in this case, Odysseus is actually the shipwrecked sailor, and the land is compared to the welcome sight of a parent who has recovered from sickness. Taaffe (1990) 137 argues that "[t]he poet links the couple through this word; it becomes emblematic of their reunion."

¹²⁷ The relieved welcome that Penelope finally feels contrasts with the welcome that Agamemnon expected to receive from his wife, Clytemnestra, but did not (11.431).

205, 20.61-66). Odysseus' return has revived her desire to live; like the shore to a shipwrecked sailor, he represents the promise of life.

Despite the sense of closure introduced by the simile, the struggles that both Penelope and Odysseus face do not end with their reunion. Odysseus tells Penelope, after they have recognized one another, that their struggles are not in fact over:

“ὦ γυναῖκα, οὐ γάρ πο πάντων ἐπὶ πείρατ' ἀέθλων
ἤλθομεν, ἀλλ' ἔτ' ὀπισθεν ἀμέτροτος πόνος ἔσται,
πολλὸς καὶ χαλεπός, τὸν ἐμὲ χρὴ πάντα τελέσσαι.
ὥς γάρ μοι ψυχὴ μαντεύσατο Τειρεσίαο
ἤματι τῷ ὅτε δὴ κατέβην δόμον Ἄϊδος εἴσω,
νόστον ἐταίροισιν διζήμενος ἠδ' ἐμοὶ αὐτῷ.” (23.248-253)

“Wife, we have not yet come to the end of our trials,
but still in the future there will be a struggle measureless,
great and difficult, which I will need to complete in its entirety.
For so did the soul of Teiresias prophesy to me
on that day, when I had descended to the house of Hades,
seeking a homecoming for my companions and myself.”

The first-person plural verb “we have come” (ἤλθομεν, 249) indicates that Odysseus includes Penelope as an agent in the trials that they still face, just as he recognized her role in the struggles that are now behind them. Teiresias had prophesied a particular trial to come, as Odysseus goes on to explain (23.264-284), which ends with Odysseus returning home again. Despite the knowledge that the trial Teiresias prophesied has an end point, Odysseus calls the struggle “measureless” (ἀμέτροτος, 249). The word conveys Odysseus' despair at the thought that he has returned only to leave again, but perhaps also expresses his awareness that veteran and wife may continue to face struggles even when they are both at home.

The narrator juxtaposes the couple's knowledge of pain to come with a demonstration of the emotional assurance offered through storytelling.¹²⁸ This juxtaposition distills the optimistic outlook of the epic in regard to its hero's reunion with his wife, his reintegration, and the ability of both parties to overcome their traumatic pasts, in stark opposition to the tragedies that I will discuss in successive chapters. Telling their individual stories forms an important part of the reunion and therapy of Penelope and Odysseus. The narrator recaps both stories, giving four lines to Penelope's account, and many more to Odysseus':

τὼ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν φιλότιτος ἔταρπήτην ἐρατεινῆς,
τερπέσθην μύθοισι, πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐνέποντε,
ἢ μὲν **ὄσ'** ἐν μεγάροισιν ἀνέσχετο δία γυναικῶν,
ἀνδρῶν μνηστήρων ἐσορῶσ' αἰδέηλον ὄμιλον,
οἱ ἔθεν εἴνεκα πολλά, βόας καὶ ἴφια μῆλα,
ἔσφαζον, πολλὸς δὲ πίθων ἠφύσσετο οἶνος·
αὐτὰρ ὁ διογενὴς Ὀδυσσεὺς **ὄσα** κήδε' ἔθηκεν
ἀνθρώποις **ὄσα** τ' αὐτὸς οἰζύσας ἐμόγησε,
πάντ' ἔλεγ'· **ἢ δ' ἄρ' ἐτέρπετ' ἀκούουσ'**, οὐδέ οἱ ὕπνος
πίπτεν ἐπὶ βλεφάροισι πάρος καταλέξει **ἅπαντα**. (23.300-309)

And when the two had satisfied their desire for pleasing love,
they delighted each other with stories, speaking to one another.
She, dazzling among women, told of **all** that she had endured in the halls,
looking upon the destructive throng of suitors,
who, because of her, slaughtered many animals, cattle and fat sheep,
and a great amount of wine was drawn from the storage jars;
but Zeus-born Odysseus told of **all** the sufferings he had made
for men, and **all** the toils that he himself had, in pain, suffered.
He told them **all, and she delighted in listening**, nor did sleep
fall upon her eyelids before he had recounted **everything** in detail.

Though it is true that Odysseus' story receives greater elaboration by the narrator, it is reading too much between the lines to say, as Hernández (2008) does, that Penelope receives short shrift

¹²⁸ On the value of “griefwork” and sharing traumatic experiences with others for rehabilitation, see Shay (1994) 4 and (2002) 15. On Odysseus' tears and tales as therapy in the episode with the Phaeacians, see Race (2014).

here.¹²⁹ The narrator indicates the thoroughness of both stories: Penelope told *all* the things she suffered in the halls (ὄσ' ἐν μεγάροισιν ἀνέσχετο, 302), just as Odysseus told all of his adventures. Odysseus' thoroughness is, however, marked several times by the narrator (ὄσα κήδε' ἔθηκεν, 306; ὄσα τ' αὐτὸς οἰζύσας ἐμόγησε, 307; πάντ' ἔλεγε, 308; καταλέξαι ἅπαντα, 309), and his story is contrasted with Penelope's through the adversative particle αὐτάρ (306). Odysseus' thoroughness is emphasized to show that, despite Agamemnon's warning not to tell his wife everything (cf. 11.442-443), Odysseus trusts his wife with the entire story, which assures her in turn that he views her as a trustworthy partner in their reunion and rebuilding of household and family.

The reaction of both parties to these stories is clear: they delight in hearing the other tell of their past struggles.¹³⁰ Penelope's delight is marked twice (τερπέσθην μύθοισι, 301; ἦ δ' ἄρα τέρπετ' ἀκούουσα, 308) in order to draw a contrast between her reaction to Odysseus' story of his return and her very different reaction to Phemius' similar story in Book 1. Phemius' song caused her to weep because it reminded her of Odysseus' absence and her own problems at home. Odysseus' song, while full of struggle and sorrow, delights her when she hears it because she now knows that those struggles are past, and that she and her husband can face their present struggles together.

¹²⁹ Hernández (2008) argues that Odysseus and Penelope are treated as equals by the narrator up until this point. On the ambivalence of Odysseus' and Penelope's *homophrosyne*, see Wohl (1993) and Holmberg (1995).

¹³⁰ On recovering from traumatic experiences, Herman (1992) 136 writes, "Therapy requires a collaborative working relationship in which both partners act on the basis of their implicit confidence in the value and efficacy of persuasion rather than coercion, ideas rather than force, mutuality rather than authoritarian control. These are precisely the beliefs that have been shattered by the traumatic experience." I disagree with Hernández (2008) 57-58 that Homeric characters do not take pleasure in a song of lament or tale of hardship.

Looking ahead

Despite the desires of third-century Alexandrian scholars, the *Odyssey* ends not with Penelope and Odysseus in bed, but with a visit to Odysseus' father and an inter-generational confrontation with the fathers of the suitors.¹³¹ Before the narrative leaves the home to settle relations with other households, however, the poet depicts the renegotiation of the roles of husband and wife within the home. When Odysseus wakes from sleep the next morning, he tells Penelope what will happen next and assigns roles to them both:

“ὦ γυναῖκα, ἤδη μὲν πολέων κεκορήμεθ' ἀέθλων
ἀμφοτέρω, σὺ μὲν ἐνθάδ' ἐμὸν πολυκηδέα νόστον
κλαίουσ'· αὐτὰρ ἐμὲ Ζεὺς ἄλγεσι καὶ θεοὶ ἄλλοι
ιέμενον πεδάσσκον ἐμῆς ἀπὸ πατρίδος αἴης.
νῦν δ' ἐπεὶ ἀμφοτέρω πολυήρατον ἰκόμεθ' εὐνήν,
κτήματα μὲν τὰ μοί ἐστι κομιζέμεν ἐν μεγάροισι,
μῆλα δ' ἅ μοι μνηστήρες ὑπερφίαλοι κατέκειραν,
πολλὰ μὲν αὐτὸς ἐγὼ ληΐσσομαι, ἄλλα δ' Ἀχαιοὶ
δώσουσ', εἰς ὃ κε πάντας ἐνιπλήσωσιν ἐπαύλους.
ἀλλ' ἦ τοι μὲν ἐγὼ πολυδένδρεον ἀγρὸν ἔπειμι
ὀψόμενος πατέρ' ἐσθλόν, ὃ μοι πυκινῶς ἀκάχηται·
σοὶ δέ, γυναῖκα, τόδ' ἐπιτέλλω πινυτῆ περ' εἰσῆς·
αὐτίκα γὰρ φάτις εἰσιν ἅμ' ἠελίῳ ἀνιόντι
ἀνδρῶν μνηστήρων, οὓς ἔκτανον ἐν μεγάροισιν·
εἰς ὑπερῶ' ἀναβάσα σὺν ἀμφιπόλοισι γυναιξὶν
ἦσθαι, μηδὲ τινα προτιόσσεο μηδ' ἐρέεινε.” (23.350-365)

“Wife, we have already had our fill of many trials,
both of us, you weeping here for my grievous return,
while Zeus and the other gods held me back with sorrows
from my native land, though I was eager to return.
But now, since we have both come to our much-loved bed,
take care of the possessions that I have within the halls,
and the flocks, which the arrogant suitors consumed,
I myself will regain many of them by plunder, and the rest
the Achaeans will give me, until they fill all my folds.
But, to be sure, I will go to the field with many trees
to see my noble father, who is deeply distressed on my behalf.

¹³¹ The scholiast *ad* 23.296 claims that Aristophanes and Aristarchus considered this line the last line of the epic (even though this ending would be grammatically impossible).

But as for you, wife, I give you this command, since you are in fact wise.
As soon as the sun rises, there will be a report
about the suitors, whom I killed in my halls.
Go up to the upper room with your slave women,
and stay there. Do not look at anyone or ask questions.”

While they were apart, they faced many trials separately, but now that they are reunited, with the bed as the iconic center of their union (νῦν δ’ ἐπεὶ ἀμφοτέρω πολυήρατον ἰκόμεθ’ εὐνήν, 354), Odysseus gives Penelope the role of manager of affairs within the house (355), and gives himself the role of recuperating the wealth that they have lost (356-357). This division of roles also applies to their immediate situation: Penelope is charged with managing the female members of the household while Odysseus deals with the suitors’ fathers. He is the ambassador between the outside world and their household, while she is the manager of its internal affairs.

Though we know little about what the division of roles in Odysseus’ household was like before he left, we can surmise from Odysseus’ speech quoted by Penelope in Book 18, and Penelope’s actions and words throughout the poem, that she assumed a new, more independent role in the house after Odysseus left. In renegotiating their roles after his return, Odysseus asks her to continue managing the house as she did during his absence, and makes for himself a role that is complementary to hers and that renews the link between his household and the community at large. While some feminist critics have expressed dissatisfaction with the way that Penelope is “dismissed once more by a male to her chamber,”¹³² I read this passage as a successful renegotiation of roles within the patriarchal world of the *Odyssey*. Modern family members of veterans often point to the renegotiation of roles within the household as a central challenge for both the family and the veteran after the veteran’s return: “Caregivers and youth in the study

¹³² See, for example, Hernández (2008) 60.

noted that reintegration of the deployed parent, while a welcome experience, also brought challenges of readjusting to the deployed parent's presence and fitting that parent into the home routine. Caregivers [i.e. spouses] in the study described difficulties in rebalancing childcare responsibilities while still ensuring that the deployed parent had the necessary time to adjust to home life."¹³³

I linger upon Odysseus' explicit division and reestablishment of roles because in tragedy the warrior's return and renegotiation of these roles, crucial to his successful reintegration into the household, are persistently challenged or disrupted by the wife of the returning veteran or by the veteran's own traumatic past. After this speech by Odysseus, by contrast, we receive no indication from the narrator of Penelope's reactions or thoughts. It is taken as a given that she will perform the role that he asks of her. At this moment in particular tragedy diverges from epic. Tragedy begins from the moment of reunion, or the expectation of reunion, and delves into the problems that past trauma poses for the reestablishment of a shared, working household, while epic leaves Penelope in silence at the very moment when she faces the changing landscape of her household and her role within it.

Penelope gives voice to many of the concerns and struggles that waiting wives in tragedy experience before their husbands return home. She shows how difficult it is to maintain a household, not knowing whether her husband is dead or alive, with a maturing son and persistent attacks from enemies. Her success in managing all of these things, despite persistent attacks, is crucial to the successful return and reintegration of her husband into his household and his community. The end of the epic, finally, with Odysseus' return and Athena's intervention and

¹³³ Chandra, et. al. (2011) 53.

treaty between Odysseus and the Ithacans, settles the *stasis* that had isolated Penelope and Telemachus in Ithaca. The three tragedies tell a very different story: the citizens of Argos (in *Agamemnon*), Trachis (in *Trachiniae*) and Thebes (in *Heracles*) offer the veteran and his wife no support.

CHAPTER 3

The “Bitter Housekeeper”:¹³⁴

Clytemnestra in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*

According to the ghost of Agamemnon at the end of the *Odyssey*, Clytemnestra casts a shadow of suspicion on all wives for the way she treats her husband upon his return from war: χαλεπήν δέ τε φῆμιν ὀπάσσει / θηλυτέροισι γυναίξι, καὶ ἥ κ’ εὐεργὸς ἔησιν (“she bestows a bad reputation on all women, even upon the one who does right,” *Od.* 24.201-202).¹³⁵ Aeschylus’ choice to elaborate her role in his *Oresteia* trilogy showcases tragedy’s interest in the problems of returning from war and re-entering the home, and the potentially traumatic effects of war on both the veteran and his family. This chapter investigates Clytemnestra’s expanded role in the *Agamemnon* and argues that her resentment and revenge are contextualized within broader questions about the justice of war to show that, while her revenge is extreme, she, her family, and the larger community in Argos are all wounded by the traumatic loss of family members’ lives during the war. The war creates both political and familial unrest at home, and both problems center upon the character of Clytemnestra, the waiting wife who turns against her husband and her remaining children and seeks power through revenge.

¹³⁴ At the end of Euripides’ *Hecuba*, Polymestor prophesies to Hecuba that her daughter, Cassandra, will be killed by Clytemnestra, whom he calls a “bitter housekeeper” (οἰκουρὸς πικρά, 1277).

¹³⁵ For the *Oresteia* story as a foil for the story of the *Odyssey*, see Woodhouse (1930) 140-141, 246-247, Düring (1943), D’Arms and Hulley (1946), Hommel (1955) 239-242, Hölscher (1967a) and (1988) 94-102, 297-310, and Olson (1990).

In the *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus presents a radically altered role for Clytemnestra, who commits the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra with her own hands and gloats over their deaths. In stark contrast to the *Odyssey*'s various accounts, which emphasize Aegisthus' agency in contriving and committing the murder,¹³⁶ Aeschylus' Aegisthus has no direct role in the murders. He arrives on-stage only after Clytemnestra has already committed the crime and boasted about it to the Chorus of Argive elders. Aegisthus' motivations and his role in the murders are significantly downplayed in order to highlight Clytemnestra's reception of her husband and to explore her motivations beyond simple seduction.¹³⁷

Pindar's *Pythian* 11 also highlights Clytemnestra's role in the murder, offering two possible explanations for her motivations: did she kill Agamemnon because of her anger at Iphigeneia's death, or did she kill him because Aegisthus had seduced her (*Pyth.* 11.22-25)?¹³⁸ Pindar emphasizes the second option (seduction and lust, ἔννυχου...κοῖται, 25) by placing this option last in the sequence and by expanding on it with a gnomic statement about adultery (*Pyth.* 11.25-27). Although the speaker of the ode does not assert that seduction is the correct explanation, he lingers upon the possibility and explores its universal application.

¹³⁶ Cf. *Od.* 1.35-36, 1.299-300, 3.194-198, 3.234-235, 3.255-275, 3.303-310, 4.90-92, 4.512-537, 11.409-411, 24.96-97. Only Agamemnon emphasizes the role of Clytemnestra in plotting his murder (11.421-434, 452-453; 24.199-200).

¹³⁷ On the play's depiction of Clytemnestra as more powerful than Aegisthus, see Winnington-Ingram (1948) 140, Gagarin (1976) 111, Zeitlin (1978) 153, and MacEwen (1990) 19.

¹³⁸ No one knows for certain whether Pindar's *Pythian* 11 was performed before or after Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, as the scholia provide conflicting information about both the date and the event celebrated: 474 in the boys' stadion and 454 in the men's diaulos (or stadion). For a discussion of the date and overview of relevant bibliography, see Finglass (2007) 5-27, who argues for 474. As Robbins (2013) 219-220 argues, the first explanation is offered by the *Cypria* and Hesiodic poems, while the second is offered by the *Odyssey*.

Aeschylus highlights the first option (Clytemnestra's anger at her daughter's death), but does not entirely suppress the second, and depicts in greater detail than either Pindar or Homer the consequences of war for different groups of people at home. In Pindar, Clytemnestra is a negative *exemplum*.¹³⁹ In the *Odyssey*, Aegisthus is the negative and Orestes the positive *exemplum*, except in the account of Agamemnon, who offers the story of Clytemnestra's betrayal as paradigmatic of all female behavior (24.199-202). As the focus of Aeschylus' play, Clytemnestra's role expands, encompassing all of the suggestions offered by her treatment in Pindar and in Homer. She is angry about her daughter's death, resentful about her husband's infidelities, and she has taken a lover of her own. In addition, she possesses political ambitions beyond what are prescribed for her as a woman, a motivation that may have been original to Aeschylus' treatment of the story. Alan Sommerstein (2010a, 137) goes further in his discussion of this aspect of Clytemnestra's motivation, identifying a possible fourth motivation as "the resentment of a stronger intellect at being dominated by a weaker merely because she is a woman." This added motivation makes Aeschylus' portrayal of Clytemnestra both more terrifying and more compelling: her agency, dominance of both language and the events onstage, control over Aegisthus, and exaltation in her vengeance are shocking and unprecedented.¹⁴⁰

Why place this terrifying, provocative wife at the center of a dramatic trilogy in 458 BC?

While many critics have discussed the political context of the trilogy, especially the reforms to

¹³⁹ On the function of the myth within the ode, see Young (1968) 1-26, who argues that the myth functions as an extended negative example. For other interpretations of the function of the myth and its relationship with tragedies, see Robbins (2013).

¹⁴⁰ Many scholars have discussed Aeschylus' portrayal of Clytemnestra as manipulating gender expectations in her grab for power. See, for example, Betensky (1978), Rosenmeyer (1982) 235-241, Podlecki (1983) 32-35, and McClure (1999) 70-100. On Clytemnestra as "king" of Argos, see Gagarin (1976) 111, Zeitlin (1978) 153, and MacEwen (1990) 19.

the Areopagus in 462/461 BC,¹⁴¹ almost no one apart from Sommerstein has highlighted the relevance of contemporary Athenian military entanglements and losses. Sommerstein points out that the *Oresteia* was produced when Athens, which had been at war with Persia for over twenty years, had also embarked on a war with another major Greek power, Corinth.¹⁴² In so doing, in 462/1 BC the Athenians had allied themselves with Argos, Sparta's long-time enemy, prompting some of the tensions that emerged more forcefully over the course of the later Peloponnesian War.¹⁴³ At the same time, Athens had sent a large expedition to Egypt after an anti-Persian rebellion broke out there. As Sommerstein (2008, xv) puts it, "with two hundred ships, this had been the largest expedition sent by any Greek city to fight in a non-Greek land since Agamemnon sailed for Troy. During one period of twelve months Athenians had fought on three continents, and had lost nearly two thousand dead."¹⁴⁴

One answer to the question of "why" may be that the play contributes to a contemporary Athenian debate about the moral problems of waging war.¹⁴⁵ When is it appropriate, or even obligatory, to wage war? At what point do war losses, particularly the loss of young lives, outweigh whatever is gained in pursuing that war? Who benefits from war? What are the effects of warfare conducted abroad, particularly massive foreign campaigns, on the people who stay at

¹⁴¹ On the political context, see Dover (1957), Dodds (1960), Bowie (1993), Schaps (1993), Griffith (1995), and Sommerstein (2010b). Macleod (1982) argues that the politics in the trilogy should be understood generally in terms of *polis* life, not necessarily in terms of specific historical events.

¹⁴² This discussion is indebted to Sommerstein (2008) xv.

¹⁴³ On the significance of the Athenian alliance with Argos in the play, see Griffith (1995).

¹⁴⁴ In a note, Sommerstein remarks that it is not clear whether the twelve-month period he refers to was that of 460 or 459.

¹⁴⁵ Rosenbloom (1995) 95 detects a similar concern in the trilogy: "The vision of [Aeschylus'] drama implies that naval hegemony, the form of war built upon it, the power derived from it, and most of all, the delusions of conquest and justice it supports, can be deleterious to the *polis*."

home? The play's attention to this last question will be my particular concern in this chapter.

Two thousand men dead in combat in a single year must have constituted a very substantial loss to Athenians, and, as I will argue below, the first half of the *Agamemnon* articulates the varied response of the people at home to the justice of the Trojan war, their losses in the war, and the army's return.

Against this backdrop, Clytemnestra initially embodies the perspective of the waiting wife, who guards the home in her husband's absence. The play's questioning of the justice of war and its mourning of war's inherent losses also raise questions about the wife: how should the wife react to her husband's homecoming, especially amid allegations or suspicions of misconduct? How should she react when he brings home a concubine as a replacement wife? These questions, which Clytemnestra acts out in the first half of the play, may have been particularly relevant to wives of veterans in contemporary Athens. As the play progresses, however, Clytemnestra takes on other guises: "king" of Argos, the avenging spirit of the house, lover of Aegisthus. The corruption in Argos is deeper than mere civil unrest because of war losses, as Agamemnon's home breeds a suppurating wound, which Clytemnestra vividly describes after she murders her husband: "before the old wound clots, there is fresh suppuration" (πρὶν καταλήξαι / τὸ παλαιὸν ἄχος, νέος ἔχωρ, 1479-1480). Clytemnestra's wound – the sacrifice of her daughter – breeds a chronic resentment that causes her to seek revenge. Her revenge, however, opens the wound again, setting off another cycle of intra-familial violence as related in the second play of the trilogy, the *Choephoroe*.

In this chapter, I analyze the play's treatment of trauma at home through the psychology of the waiting wife who rejects her role because of past loss, growing resentment, and lust for revenge. I begin by describing the perspectives of three different groups that make up the home

front in Argos as a backdrop for Clytemnestra's resentment. The various perspectives of the people at home raise questions, as articulated above, about the justice of the war and the reception of Agamemnon in Argos. This picture of the home front is further complicated by Clytemnestra's contradictory performances as a "masculine" speaker/actor and as the ideal waiting wife. Clytemnestra brilliantly performs the role of the good waiting wife in deceptive speeches to Agamemnon and his herald, but lets her power outside the home show in speeches to the Chorus. In sections 2 and 3 I detail both her performance of the role of the typical waiting wife and her rejection of it. In section 4 I discuss Clytemnestra's resentment of her husband's concubine, Cassandra, a trope that receives particular prominence in this and other *nostos* plays. In the last section, I discuss in greater detail Clytemnestra's motivations, and the psychological portrait of her resentment and desire for revenge. As often in tragedy, the home is intimately implicated in politics,¹⁴⁶ and Clytemnestra's resentment and revenge are motivated both by the loss of her daughter and by her desire for power in the city. Although she appears monstrous in her revenge and abnormal in her lust for power, Clytemnestra also gives voice to concerns and feelings that may have been shared by contemporary Athenian women, who may have experienced the trauma of war through the death of loved ones in combat or through abuse or neglect by their veteran husbands. Her resentment in particular may have struck a chord, at the

¹⁴⁶ On the relation between *oikos* and *polis* in the *Oresteia*, see Foley (1982) 3: "while tragedies often reestablish boundaries between household and state (e.g., the *Oresteia*), they suggest in the process that the interests and values of the two institutions are not as separable or as easily differentiated as they might have appeared. Agamemnon's killing of Iphigeneia becomes emblematic of a costly and disastrous war policy; tyranny emerges in the wake of this neglect of family. *Oikos* and *polis* are mutually defining oppositions. Order in one sphere is inextricably related to order in the other." This observation also applies to the *Odyssey*.

same time that it is condemned by the plot of the trilogy, which privileges patriarchal over matriarchal authority.¹⁴⁷

The home front in Argos

In the first 809 lines of *Agamemnon*, before Agamemnon enters and speaks onstage, Aeschylus presents the perspectives of three groups who react to the war and the army's return: the Watchman, with whom the play begins; the Chorus of Argive elders; and the general population of Argos, described by the Chorus and by Clytemnestra. These three groups range in their perceptions of the war and Agamemnon's return from cautiously positive (the Watchman) to ambivalent (the Chorus) to disapproving and hostile (the general population of Argos). These three differing perspectives provide a foil to Clytemnestra's perspective, which is belatedly revealed in her triumphant speech over Agamemnon's dead body (1372-1398).

The multiple perspectives presented in the play demonstrate that returning home after an unpopular war is more complicated than the *Odyssey* suggests with its happy ending, decisively marked by a treaty sanctified by Zeus between Odysseus and the people of Ithaca.¹⁴⁸ By contrast, the *Agamemnon* shows that some people on the home front may support the war effort and the soldiers who fought in it, while others may express ambivalence or even hostility toward the soldier upon his return. Aeschylus presents these multiple perspectives in order to foreground

¹⁴⁷ On the trilogy's affirmation of patriarchal over matriarchal authority, see de Beauvoir (1949) 89 n. 9, Millett (1970) 111-115, Zeitlin (1978), Case (1988) 12-15.

¹⁴⁸ On this happy ending, Heubeck (1992) *ad Od.* 24.482-5 remarks: "Zeus' plan is that following the just punishment of the suitors a treaty should be sworn, by which Odysseus will enjoy the privilege of kingship for life, and the kinsmen of the suitors will forgo revenge, so that unity, prosperity, and peace will reign as formerly. This plan is of the greatest importance in the history of ideas: it means nothing less than the abolition of the law of the blood-feud, which had hitherto prevailed without qualification; in its place is established a new political order based on justice and law, and validated by the gods, in which a just and benevolent king ensures wealth and freedom [...] The poet is here the advocate and herald of a new age."

Clytemnestra's resentment as an authentic reaction to the loss of her daughter, while at the same time condemning her destructive revenge. Clytemnestra's resentment is mirrored by the resentment of the general population of Argos, which grew from the overwhelming loss of so much life for the sake of a questionable cause over ten long years at war. Such resentment is not alien to the experiences of people in many modern countries, including the US, where protests against the Vietnam War, and more recently, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, highlight the loss of life there.¹⁴⁹ While the circumstances that prompt Clytemnestra's furious revenge are particular to her situation, her chronic resentment at her husband's deployment and his betrayal of the family, as Clytemnestra sees it, speaks to the feelings of wives victimized by war.

The Watchman

Opening the play with a monologue delivered from the rooftop of Agamemnon's house,¹⁵⁰ the Watchman declares his loyalty to his returning master.¹⁵¹ He characterizes himself as a loyal

¹⁴⁹ The obvious difference between monarchic Argos and modern America is that dissent in the public sphere is not tolerated, but rather repressed in Argos.

¹⁵⁰ I follow Taplin (1977) 452-459, Sommerstein (2010a) 155, and Raeburn and Thomas (2011) 65, among others, *pace* Metzger (2005), in imagining that the Watchman probably delivered his monologue, either standing (Raeburn and Thomas 2011, 65) or lying down (Sommerstein 2010a, 155), from the top of the *skene*, which represented Agamemnon's house. Sommerstein (2010a) 155 speculates, "the first words of the trilogy are spoken, from the roof of the house, by a character who is at that moment invisible, at least to many of the spectators; and briefly, until we realize who the speaker is, it will seem as though the house itself is praying to the gods to release it from its troubles."

¹⁵¹ The representation of the watchman as loyal to Agamemnon diverges from his representation in the *Odyssey* as a bribed servant of Aegisthus (*Od.* 4.524). See Raeburn and Thomas (2011) xxii-xxiv, 65 for a comparison between the myth as presented in the *Odyssey* and in the *Agamemnon*. Fraenkel (1950) 26 comments: "Whatever Agamemnon's faults in other respects may be, to the people of his household he is a kind master, whom they not only respect but love. The affectionate feeling and deep devotion in l. 34 f. should not be disregarded. The Watchman is longing for the king's return with a fervent desire worthy of Eumaeus. The first mention of Agamemnon in the play is bound to stir the sympathy of the audience in his favour. This detail, more than anything else, makes it clear how much the poet gained by substituting the faithful servant of Agamemnon for the bribed hireling of Aegisthus."

watchdog as he reclines and waits “in the manner of a dog” (κυνὸς δίκην, 3).¹⁵² Clytemnestra later characterizes herself as loyal to Agamemnon in similar terms: δωμάτων κύνα / ἐσθλήν ἐκείνω, πολεμίαν τοῖς δύσφροσιν (“watchdog of the house, faithful to him, but hostile to his detractors,” 607-608). By introducing the imagery of the loyal watchdog, the Watchman’s speech sets the stage for a comparison between the various watchdogs of Agamemnon’s house.¹⁵³

Though he never mentions Clytemnestra by name, the Watchman alludes to her as the source of his current suffering, since she has ordered him to wait for the beacon signal: ὦδε γὰρ κρατεῖ / γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαο (“for so rules a woman’s expectant heart, which plans like a man,” 10-11).¹⁵⁴ As the first mention of Clytemnestra in the play, the choice of adjectives prefigures her later characterization: like a typical waiting wife, she is expectant (ἐλπίζον, 11), anxiously waiting for her husband to return home. Yet unlike a typical waiting wife, she “plans like a man” (ἀνδρόβουλον, 11), arranging a beacon system and posting a watchman to inform her so that she can prepare her revenge. The tension generated by Clytemnestra’s characterization as both like and unlike the typical waiting wife is crucial to the

¹⁵² For discussion of what this phrase implies about the Watchman’s position and appearance, see Denniston and Page (1957) 89, Renehan (1970) 125-127, Neitzel (1979a) 191-209, and Bollack (1981, vol. 1) 8-12.

¹⁵³ The importance of dog imagery in the play has been noted by Lebeck (1971) 66-67, Harriott (1982) 9-17, Goldhill (1984) 56-57, 204-205, and Wilson (2006) 190-194. See also Raeburn and Thomas (2011) lxvi-lxviii on dog imagery in the *Agamemnon* and Franco (2014) 105-106, 125-126, 140-142 on the canine attributes of Clytemnestra. The *Agamemnon*’s dog imagery plays on two Homeric paradigms: Argos, the loyal dog, in the *Odyssey* and Priam’s dogs in the *Iliad*, who turn on their master.

¹⁵⁴ Raeburn and Thomas (2011) 67 comment that the four weighty words in line 11 lend it emphasis. Many scholars, including Goldhill (1984) 9 and McClure (1999) 73-74, have argued that the idea of a woman “ruling” (κρατεῖ, 10) and the juxtaposition of γυναικὸς ἀνδρό- call attention to the characterization of Clytemnestra as androgynous, or subverting gender roles. Martha Graham describes Clytemnestra as a “career woman,” a phrase that would strike ancient Greeks as an oxymoron, yet remains apt for describing her gender-defying ambitions, and the play’s obsession with gender-related oxymoron. Cited by Gerolemou (2011) 81; Graham’s remark is discussed by Komar (2003) 64.

suspense maintained in the first half of the play, during which Clytemnestra deceives others about her intentions by playing the part of the typical waiting wife.¹⁵⁵ Her “man-planning” actions contribute to the sense of foreboding surrounding Agamemnon’s return, although it is not yet clear what exactly Clytemnestra plans for Agamemnon.¹⁵⁶

Throughout his speech, the Watchman indicates that though he obeys Clytemnestra as a surrogate master, he remains loyal to Agamemnon. He also hints at the poor condition of his master’s house because of his absence: *κλαίω τότ’ οἴκου τοῦδε συμφορὰν στένων / οὐχ ὡς τὰ πρόσθ’ ἄριστα διαπονουμένου* (“I grieve for the misfortune of this house, since it is not being managed in the best way, as it was before,” 18-19). The Watchman makes clear that he looks forward to Agamemnon’s return because it will provide a “release from toils” (*ἀπαλλαγὴ πόνων*, 20, cf. 1) in two senses: he will no longer be forced to endure tedious, sleepless nights, watching for a sign of Agamemnon’s return, and Clytemnestra will no longer be his master.

When the long-awaited signal finally appears, the Watchman refers to Clytemnestra not as the woman who rules over him (*κρατεῖ*, 10), as before, but instead as “Agamemnon’s wife” (*Ἀγαμέμνωνος γυναικί*, 26). Though he will report the beacon signal to Clytemnestra, the Watchman aligns himself with Agamemnon, praying that his master may return home so that he can clasp his “dear hand” (*εὐφιλή χεῖρα*, 34) in his own. The ending of his speech, however, again casts doubt upon whether Agamemnon’s return will be happy, as the Watchman promises to keep silent about “the rest,” (*τὰ δ’ ἄλλα σιγῶ*, 36), hinting at the house’s (i.e.

¹⁵⁵ For a discussion of the suspense generated by Clytemnestra’s character in *Agamemnon*, see Bednarowski (2015) 189-191.

¹⁵⁶ For the vacillation from foreboding to joy and back to foreboding in the Watchman’s speech, see Vaughn (1976) 337.

Clytemnestra's) secrets, known only by those who already know them.¹⁵⁷ While the Watchman professes his own loyalty to Agamemnon and his excitement at his return, he also hints that others, particularly those in Agamemnon's house, may not have the same attitude.

Clytemnestra's role, as in line 11 (γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαο), is left in doubt.

The Chorus

The Watchman's positive view of Agamemnon, colored though it is by his foreboding about Clytemnestra and the current condition of the royal house, contrasts with the Chorus' ambivalent perspective as articulated in the *parodos*, which immediately follows. In addition to setting the scene and explaining the Chorus' presence in Argos, these opening anapests sound an initial positive note concerning the expedition against Troy. They emphasize that Menelaus and Agamemnon are legitimate kings, whose rule is sanctioned by Zeus (διθρόνου Διόθεν καὶ δισκήπτρου / τιμῆς ὄχυρόν ζεύγος Ἄτρειδᾶν, 43-44), and they use legal language to characterize the war as just: Menelaus is the "great prosecutor" (μέγας ἀντίδικος, 41) of Priam.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, the simile the Chorus uses, which compares Menelaus and Agamemnon to birds of prey, shrieking and wheeling about in grief for the loss of their children (i.e. Helen), also asserts divine support for the expedition:

ὔπατος δ' αἰὼν ἢ τις Ἀπόλλων
ἢ Πᾶν ἢ Ζεὺς οἰωνόθροον
γόνον ὄξυβόαν τῶνδε μετοίκων,
ὑστερόποινον
πέμπει παραβάσιν Ἐρινύν. (55-59)

Either some Apollo on high
or Pan or Zeus, hearing the shrill, lamenting

¹⁵⁷ For the language of initiation in the prologue and its possible link with the Eleusinian mysteries, see Bowie (1993) 24.

¹⁵⁸ For the use of legal language in the play, see Daube (1939) 2-4 and Robertson (1939) 209-219. For the characterization of the Chorus of *Agamemnon* as twelve jurors, see Gantz (1983).

bird-cry of these foreign residents of their domain,
sends a late-avenging Fury against the transgressors.

The Chorus names several possible gods – Apollo, Pan, or Zeus – as the source of the Fury unleashed on those who stole the vultures’ young, the Trojans, who are condemned as “transgressors” (παρὰβᾶσιν, 59). The first glimpse offered by the Chorus of the Atreidae and their expedition against Troy is positive: the Atreidae are supported by the gods and, in waging war, are prosecuting a wrong committed against them.

At the same time that the Chorus indicates Zeus Xenios’ support, however, they also weigh the costs of the war for both sides:

οὕτω δ’ Ἀτρέως παῖδας ὁ κρείσσων
ἐπ’ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ πέμπει ξένιος
Ζεὺς πολυάνορος ἀμφὶ γυναικός,
πολλὰ παλαισματα καὶ γυιοβαρῆ,
γόνατος κονίαισιν ἐρειδομένου
διακναιομένης τ’ ἐν προτελείοις
κάμακος, θήσων Δαναοῖσιν
Τρωσί θ’ ὁμοίως. (60-67)

And so the mightier Zeus Xenios
sends the sons of Atreus against Alexander
for the sake of a wife of many husbands,
so as to impose many struggles that weigh down limbs,
with knees being pressed in the dust,
and a spear-shaft split
in the prenuptial rites, upon the Greeks
and the Trojans alike.

The juxtaposition of the cause of war – an adulterous woman (πολυάνορος ἀμφὶ γυναικός, 62) – beside the horrible struggles endured by both sides presents an implicit cost-benefit analysis: is one adulterous woman worth such a war? While the Greek cause is supported by Zeus and possibly other divinities, the Greeks still suffer as much as the Trojans do when it comes to the realities of the war and the inevitable loss of life on both sides.

The same ambivalence marks the Chorus' narration of the expedition's departure from Aulis in the lyric sections of the *parodos*. The refrain that punctuates this song sums up the ambivalence well: "Cry sorrow, sorrow, but may the good prevail!" (αἶλινον αἶλινον εἶπέ, τό δ' εὖ νικάτω, 121, 138, 159).¹⁵⁹ The narrative of the departure appears to begin favorably: the expedition receives an omen that the Chorus presents as positive in the first strophe. They call it "auspicious" (αἶσιον, 104) since the eagles, kings of the birds as Agamemnon and Menelaus are commanders of the expedition, passed on the right, "spear-wielding" side (114-116). The army, called the "youth of Greece," is also characterized as concordant with the plans of their leaders: Ἑλλάδος ἦβας / ξύμφορα ταγάν (109-110). Yet when the prophet Calchas interprets the omen, he reveals that the omen is both auspicious (δεξιὰ, 145) because it signals that the Greek army will capture Troy, and inauspicious, "causing blame" (κατάμομφα, 145), because Artemis bears a grudge (ἐπίφθονος Ἄρτεμις, 134) against their commanders for the eagles' dinner of a pregnant hare (δείπνον αἰετῶν, 137).¹⁶⁰ I agree with those who interpret Artemis' anger in this passage as a response to the loss of young life at Troy symbolized by the eagles' feast on the pregnant hare's unborn children.¹⁶¹ Her resentment for this loss foreshadows Clytemnestra's resentment at the loss of her daughter's life.

¹⁵⁹ Raeburn and Thomas (2011) 80 comment, "The repeated cry αἶλινον is particularly associated with dirges (cf. Soph. *Aj.* 627). Combined with 'but may the good win out' it exemplifies a repeated pattern, already established at 17-21, whereby a character is led to an ominous or negative utterance which he or she can only hope to rectify by forced optimism."

¹⁶⁰ For the use of δείπνον to refer to an animal's meal, see West (1979) 3, who argues that Archilochus' fable of the fox and the eagle influenced Aeschylus' account of the portent.

¹⁶¹ For this interpretation of the cause of Artemis' wrath, see Klausen (1829) 98, Daube (1939) 141-150, Finley (1955) 252, Kitto (1961) 65-69, Lloyd-Jones (1962) 187-198, Sommerstein (1971), West (1979) 5, Smith (1980) 76 n. 101, and Lawrence (2013) 72, who writes: "Aeschylus presents the war ambivalently as at once the triumph of Zeus Xenios and a waste of lives (presumably on both sides, and affecting combatant and civilian alike) for the sake of a promiscuous woman (62, 447-8). It is entirely appropriate then that the portent should encapsulate this moral ambivalence, and that its ultimate consequence in the play – the murder of Agamemnon – should thus appear in part a punishment or at least a price paid for the

Indeed, Calchas' prophecy about the string of events that will follow if the "sacrificial slaughter" takes place links Artemis' wrath directly with Clytemnestra's:

“...σπευδομένα θυσίαν ἑτέραν ἄνομόν τιν’ ἄδαιτον,
νεικέων τέκτονα σύμφυτον, οὐ δει-
σήνορα· μίμνει γὰρ φοβερὰ παλίνορτος
οἰκονόμος δολία, μνάμων Μῆνις τεκνόποιος.” (150-155)

“...[Artemis] hastening on another sacrifice, one without music and feasting,
an inborn maker of strife, not fearing any man.
For a fearful, deceitful housekeeper waits,
about to rise again, mindful, child-avenging Wrath.”

Whereas the original audience of Calchas' pronouncement, and perhaps even the Chorus,¹⁶² may not have connected the "deceitful housekeeper" with Clytemnestra, the phrase οἰκονόμος δολία and the emphasis on waiting (μίμνει, 154) correspond with her characterization elsewhere in the play.¹⁶³

The Chorus is also disturbed by the loss of life. Their narrative of Iphigeneia's sacrifice depicts Agamemnon's decision as impious and unholy (δυσσεβῆ...ἄναγνον ἀνίερον, 219-220).¹⁶⁴ They imply through an explanatory gnome that Agamemnon's decision was the result of

waste of lives." Peradotto (1969) 246 argues for a triple reference to the *cena Thyestea*, the murder of Iphigeneia, and the murder of innocent people at Troy: "These three analogous events stand to the omen of the slaughtered hare as species to a kind of symbolic genus; the omen subsumes all three events, relating them one to another as cases of the slaughter of innocent youth in the pursuit and exercise of power." *Contra* Fraenkel (1950, vol. 2) 96-99, Denniston and Page (1957) xxiii, Whallon (1961), Lebeck (1971) 35, Ewans (1975) 22, 28, Lawrence (1976), Neitzel (1979b), Sommerstein (1980), W. D. Furley (1986), Degener (2001).

¹⁶² As Fletcher (1999) 31 points out, "Although the elders repeat the words of Calchas, they never seem to be able to apply his prophecy to the dramatic action." Gantz (1983) argues that one of the Chorus' persistent personality traits is its inability to face the truth about Agamemnon's impending death.

¹⁶³ Fraenkel (1950) *ad* 154 and W. D. Furley (1986) 112-113 argue against the connection between Clytemnestra and the "deceitful housekeeper," but most other commentators make the connection.

¹⁶⁴ Since Lloyd-Jones (1962), who argues that Agamemnon is forced to choose between two crimes and does not make a choice of his own free will, but rather because his wits are removed by Zeus, there has been heated scholarly discussion about the question of Agamemnon's free will. I agree with those who claim that Agamemnon does exercise choice, and that his choice reveals his priorities and his character;

“shameful scheming” (αἰσχρομήτις, 222) that would bring on further sorrows (πρωτοπήμων, 223). Their synopsis of the event corresponds with their earlier judgment of the war as a whole:

ἔτλα δ’ οὖν θυτῆρ γενέ-
σθαι θυγατρός, γυναικοποι-
νων πολέμων ἀρωγὰν
καὶ προτέλεια ναῶν. (224-227)

However that may be, he dared to become
the sacrificer of his daughter, to aid
a war fought in revenge for a woman
and as a preliminary rite for the ships.

The Chorus compares the expedition’s goal, avenging the theft of the “wife of many husbands” (cf. 62), which was previously characterized as just, with the means to achieve that end, the sacrifice of the commander’s daughter, an event that the Chorus condemns as worse than unjust: it is unholy, impious, the beginning of future sorrows. Moreover, the compound γυναικοποιῶν (225) echoes Calchas’ foreboding prophesy about the “child-avenging” (τεκνόποιος, 155) housekeeper, intimating that the one action – a war undertaken for a stolen woman – will be countered by a second – revenge for the loss of a child.

see, for example, Hammond (1965) 47, who writes, “The choice is, of course, a difficult one. It is very familiar to those who are engaged in a war and exercise command, as so many Athenians were doing in 458 B.C.; for the question is this – is one to stop or is one to take an action which will involve the death of innocent persons? [...] The choice is bitter. But it is very much a choice, and a choice for which one bears a heavy personal responsibility.” For further support for Hammond’s position, see Peradotto (1969) 253-254, Tyrrell (1976), and Lawrence (2013) 73-80. Lesky (1966) 82 argues for a “union of external coercion and personal readiness,” which means that men act out of divine coercion, but must nonetheless accept responsibility for their actions. Dover (1973) argues that Agamemnon is depicted as realistically making a decision that he does not fully understand. Edwards (1977) attempts to moderate between these views, combining elements of the interpretations of Lloyd-Jones (1962) and Lesky (1966). Gantz (1982) 1 argues that characters in Aeschylus “operate under a constraint which is both external and internal, that of a curse brought on by inherited guilt to negate their free will paradoxically at the very moment when they are expressing it.” On inherited guilt and Agamemnon’s choice, see also Sewell-Rutter (2007) 20-23 and Gagné (2013) 394-416.

Moreover, the Chorus' emotional description of Iphigeneia's death condemns the sacrifice by generating *pathos* for the girl. She is handled like a sacrificial goat (δίκαν χιμαίρας, 232),¹⁶⁵ forcefully bridled and turned upside down (232-238). She looks at her sacrificers with glances to stir their pity (βέλει φιλοίκτω, 241) and is prevented only by the bridle from calling out their names, which she knows from singing hymns for her father's good fortune at his banquets (242-247). By refusing to narrate the final blow, the Chorus condemns through their silence this impious means to an end. As earlier in the hymn, they move from confronting the war's waste of young life to assuring themselves that it is both just and necessary: Δίκη δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦσιν μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει ("Justice, on the one hand, weighs out learning to those who have experienced it," 250-251).¹⁶⁶ They recognize the moral dilemma posed by the war, but they consistently refuse to address its implications.

When the Chorus greets Agamemnon upon his long-awaited arrival, they declare their ambivalence about the war and their loyalty to Agamemnon outright, contrasting themselves with others who dissimulate:

ὅστις δ' ἀγαθὸς προβατογνῶμων,
οὐκ ἔστι λαθεῖν ὄμματα φωτὸς
τὰ δοκοῦντ' εὐφρονος ἐκ διανοίας
ὑδαρεῖ σαίνειν φιλότητι.
σὺ δέ μοι τότε μὲν στέλλων στρατιὰν
'Ελένης ἔνεκ', οὐκ ἐπικεύσω,
κάστ' ἀπομούσως ἦσθα γεγραμμένος
οὐδ' εὖ πρᾶπίδων οἶακα νέμων,

¹⁶⁵ Raeburn and Thomas (2011) 93 note, "This is a poignant context in which to find a form of δίκη." See Wilson (2006) 194-196 for a broader discussion of the relationship between this phrase and the theme of justice in the trilogy.

¹⁶⁶ Smith (1980) 34 argues for a similar function for the Hymn to Zeus within the parodos: "They have reached the crisis of their narrative, but at first they shrink, like Kalchas, from describing the sacrifice itself. It is not simply pity for Iphigeneia which moves them; it is the moral problem of innocent suffering exacted by the gods. In their anguish here they turn both to Zeus and to themselves in earnest reasoning: there *is* no other thing or person to which Iphigeneia's death may be referred but 'Zeus.'"

<αἰπὺ γυναικός> θάρσος ἐκούσιον¹⁶⁷
ἀνδράσι θνήσκουσι κομίζων·
νῦν δ' οὐκ ἀπ' ἄκρας φρενὸς οὐδ' ἀφίλωσ
εὐφρων πόνον εὐτέλεσασιν <ἐγώ>
γνώση δὲ χρόνῳ διαπευθόμενος
τόν τε δικαίως καὶ τὸν ἀκαίρως
πόλιν οἰκουροῦντα πολιτῶν. (795-809)

But whoever is a good judge of a flock
cannot be deceived by a mortal's eyes,
which seem out of kindly purpose
to fawn with feeble friendship.
But as for me, at the time when you were sending out an expedition
for the sake of Helen – I will not conceal it –
you were painted very unfavorably,
and you did not steer the tiller of your mind correctly,
carrying away the <sheer>, willing boldness <of a woman>
by means of dying men.
But now, from the depths of my mind and not without affection,
I am friendly toward those who have accomplished their labor well.
And in time you will know through careful inquiry
which of the citizens acted justly and which inappropriately
while keeping watch over the city.

The Chorus revives the imagery of the dog with references to “fawning” (σαίνειν, 795) and “keeping watch,” (οἰκουροῦντα, 809), thereby warning Agamemnon to watch out for his own “watchdog,” Clytemnestra, who will fawn over him in her welcome speech only to deceive him.¹⁶⁸ While the Chorus admits their own disapproval of the expedition “for the sake of Helen” (Ἐλένης ἔνεκα, 800), they also distinguish themselves from other citizens (and Clytemnestra), who conceal their disapproval in order to deceive Agamemnon.¹⁶⁹ The final sentence of their

¹⁶⁷ I have adopted West's suggestion for the lacuna posited by Weil. Page prints Ahrens' emendation of the manuscripts' θράσος ἐκούσιον: θράσος ἐκ θυσιῶν, referring to the soldiers who were dying at Aulis. Following Raeburn and Thomas (2011) *ad* 803-804, I think a reference to Aulis does not make sense here.

¹⁶⁸ For a discussion of these verbs – and this passage in general – in relation to dogs' activities, see Harriott (1982) and Franco (2014) 140-142.

¹⁶⁹ On the Chorus' conflicted and confused reaction to Agamemnon's return, see Scott (1969) 336 and Gantz (1983) 81.

greeting urges Agamemnon to judge carefully, as Odysseus does in Books 14-21 of the *Odyssey*, which of the people who remained at home are trustworthy.

As Harriott (1982) has shown, Agamemnon's response indicates that he does not fully understand the Chorus' warning. His example of Odysseus, who did not sail willingly on the expedition at first, but ended up being the most loyal of all (841-844), indicates that he does not anticipate the type of deception or false flattery that awaits him from his wife. Instead, his use of this example is intended to assure the Chorus that he does not hold anything against those who initially opposed the expedition, so long as they remain loyal to him. He focuses instead on the citizens of Argos, whose dissent he promises to address later, using a surgical metaphor to describe the procedure of removing disloyal elements from the citizen population: ἤτοι κέαυτες ἢ τεμόυτες εὐφρόνως ("either by burning or cutting judiciously," 849). His response substitutes medical language directed at the body politic for the watchdog imagery that the Chorus used to hint at a danger within Agamemnon's home.

The citizens of Argos

Perhaps the Chorus chooses to be vague about the threat that Agamemnon faces at his own door because he also faces a threat from within the citizen body. In the first stasimon, the Chorus indicates that a third group, the people of Argos, may no longer be loyal to Agamemnon or celebrate his return. They begin their discussion of the home front by describing with sympathy the plight of waiting wives, mothers, and sisters:

τὸ πᾶν δ' ἄφ' Ἑλλανος αἶας συνορμένοισι πέν-
θεια τλησικάρδιος
δόμῳ ἕν ἑκάστου πρόπει. (429-431)

But in general, for those who set out from the land of Greece,
a grieving woman with an enduring heart
is conspicuous in each man's house.

This everywoman's "enduring heart" (τλησικάρδιος, 430) contrasts significantly with that of Helen, who in an earlier strophe is described as leaving her home "lightly" (ρίμφα, 407) and "daring what should not be dared" (ἄτλητα τλάσα, 408). These faithful waiting women are conspicuous in their houses (δόμω ἔν ἐκάστου πρόπει, 431), whereas Helen is conspicuous in her absence from hers (cf. ἰὼ λέχος καὶ στίβοι φιλόνορες, 411). The Chorus thus calls attention to the pain that Helen's daring – and the war – caused for these good wives and mothers; their endurance (τλησικάρδιος, 430) is tested by her daring (ἄτλητα τλάσα, 408).¹⁷⁰

To many of these houses, men return only as ashes (432-444).¹⁷¹ The Chorus describes how the numerous funerals that the people of Argos attend cause their grief and their resentment of the Atreidae to build:¹⁷²

στένουσι δ' εὖ λέγοντες ἄν-
δρα τὸν μὲν ὡς μάχης ἴδρις,
τὸν δ' ἐν φοναίς καλῶς πεσόντ',
ἄλλοτρίας διαὶ γυναι-
κός· τάδε σίγά τις βαύ-
ζει, φθονερόν δ' ὑπ' ἄλγος ἔρ-
πει προδίκοις Ἀτρεΐδαις. (445-451)

And they lament, eulogizing one man
as skillful in battle,
another as having fallen nobly amidst the carnage,
"because of another man's wife."
People snarl these things under their breath,
and resentful grief spreads secretly
against the prosecutors, the Atreidae.

¹⁷⁰ τλησικάρδιος and ἄτλητα τλάσα share the same root.

¹⁷¹ Jacoby (1944) 44 believes that this passage in *Agamemnon* refers, anachronistically, to the Athenian custom of bringing home for a public funeral the cremated remains of soldiers killed abroad. See also Leahy (1974) 4.

¹⁷² For the role of funeral lamentations in inciting revenge in ancient Athens, see Alexiou (1974) 21-22. See also Holst-Warhaft (1992) 135-161 on the ability of lament to provoke violence in the *Oresteia*.

Although the legal language used to justify the war returns here (προδίκους Ἀτρεΐδαις, 451), perhaps focalized from the perspective of the Chorus, the citizens of Argos view the war as fought for an unjust cause (ἀλλοστρίας διαὶ γυναικός, 448-449).¹⁷³ Like dogs, they “snarl” (βαύζει, 449), indicating their hostility to Agamemnon and their grief at their loss.¹⁷⁴ Unlike the Watchman, who was compared to a loyal watchdog, the citizens of Argos are like dogs that have turned against their master because of their resentment at their losses. In this way, they are similar to Clytemnestra as she presents herself later in the play, though the audience does not yet know the extent of her resentment.

Also like Clytemnestra, the citizens attempt to hide their ill-will as they plot against Agamemnon:

βαρεία δ' ἀστών φάτις σὺν κότῳ,
δημοκράντου δ' ἄρας τίνει χρέος·
μένει δ' ἀκούσαι τί μου
μέριμνα νυκτηρεφές. (456-460)

The heavy talk of the citizens, mixed with ill-will,
pays the debt of a curse ratified by the people,
and my anxiety waits to hear
of something covered up by night.

¹⁷³ Leahy (1974) 7 remarks upon the contemporary realism (as opposed to epic idealism) in this, and other, descriptions of war in this play: “There is no sense here of that mysterious Helen of epic, for whom it was not unfitting that Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans should undergo long suffering: here she is simply a woman, and another man’s wife at that, assessed by the realistic standards of contemporary male-oriented society as not worth the lives of brave men.”

¹⁷⁴ Garvie (2009) *ad* 12-13, in his commentary on the *Persae*, notes that the verb βαύζειν “usually (e.g. Heraclit. fr. 97 D-K, Ag. 449, Ar. *Thesm.* 173, 895, Theocr. 6.10) expresses hostility.” For the passage in the *Persae*, he argues for a meaning closer to “lament.” Here, at Ag. 449, the verb could carry both connotations, a kind of hostile grief.

The official curse of the people (δημοκράντου ἀράς, 457) indicates an alternative system of justice, initiated by the people against their rulers.¹⁷⁵ Later in the play, the Chorus threatens Clytemnestra with these same public curses (δημοθρόους ἀράς, 1409; cf. δημορριφείς...ἀράς, 1616), but she has significantly less faith in the people's ability to apply justice, since they did not do so when Iphigeneia was sacrificed (cf. 1412-1418). Then, perhaps, the people had little personal motivation to object, since it was not yet their own family members being sacrificed for the war. Now, with the loss of their own so palpable, the citizens of Argos strongly disapprove of the Atreidae's actions in the war and question its justification, and the Chorus at least fears that the people will remain hostile and perhaps even attack Agamemnon when he returns.

The potential foment among the citizens at home provides a negative contrast to the Watchman's and the Chorus' joyful responses to news of the army's return. Their "resentful grief" (φθονερόν ἄλγος, 450) prepares for the dramatic revelation of Clytemnestra's resentful revenge, even while Clytemnestra's response to Agamemnon's return remains in suspense in this opening sequence of the play. The motif of the watchdog, whether loyal or hostile, connects these responses through suggestive imagery, preparing for Clytemnestra's role as dissimulating watchdog, who appears to fawn, but is in fact hostile to her "master." These three perspectives are explored at length in the 809 lines before Agamemnon's entrance in order to demonstrate the complexity of responses to the war on the home front and to provide context for Clytemnestra's responses, both feigned and real. The Herald and Agamemnon both expect a positive reception upon their return, and are tone deaf to clues from the Chorus and from Clytemnestra about the dissent and resentment of those who remained at home. By not anticipating the complexity of the

¹⁷⁵ On the relationship between nighttime plots and the political background of the play, especially the assassination of Ephialtes, see Sommerstein (2010b).

reception that he will receive upon his return, Agamemnon falls easily into Clytemnestra's ambush.

Playing the good wife

As the literary prototype of the faithful waiting wife, Penelope's behavior, concerns, and hardships in the *Odyssey*, as discussed in Chapter 2, set the stage for the portrayal of waiting wives, both good and bad, in Greek tragedy. Like Penelope, these tragic waiting wives take on greater responsibilities – and risk greater vulnerability – after their husbands leave for war; they are consistently referred to as the guardians of their households in their husbands' absence.¹⁷⁶ They also share a similar set of concerns about their expected behavior and duties at home, and about their husbands' returns. Clytemnestra, who is the prototype of the bad waiting wife from the *Odyssey* onwards,¹⁷⁷ is represented in the *Agamemnon* as understanding thoroughly the role expected of her. She uses this understanding to manipulate the Chorus, the Herald, and Agamemnon into believing that she poses no threat to Agamemnon's return and reintegration into the household.

Clytemnestra's understanding of the expected behavior, duties, and anxieties of waiting wives is best articulated in two speeches preceding Agamemnon's murder: one addressed to the Herald in the second episode, and one to Agamemnon himself in the third. In the first of these

¹⁷⁶ Cf. τὸδ' ἄγχιστον Ἀπίας γαίας μονόφρουρον ἔρκος, *Ag.* 256-257; δωμάτων κύνα, *Ag.* 607; δωμάτων ἐμῶν φύλαξ, *Ag.* 914; οἰκούρι' ἀντέπεμψε τοῦ μακροῦ χρόνου, *Soph. Trach.* 542; μακρὰς διαντλοῦσ' ἐν δόμοις οἰκουρίας, *Eur. Her.* 1373. Ischomachus in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* remarks that the house is the wife's domain and that god imposed upon her the guarding of the house's stores (τὸ φυλάττειν τὰ εἰσενεχθέντα, 7.25).

¹⁷⁷ For Clytemnestra's depiction in literature before *Agamemnon*, see the discussion at the beginning of this chapter and Vogel-Ehrensperger (2012) 5–46.

speeches, she boasts that she has fulfilled the responsibilities expected of a wife whose husband is away at war:

γυναῖκα πιστήν δ' ἐν δόμοις εὗροι μολῶν
οἶανπερ οὖν ἔλειπε, δωμάτων κύνα
ἔσθλην ἐκείνῳ, πολεμίαν τοῖς δύσφροσιν,
καὶ τᾶλλ' ὁμοίαν πάντα, σημαντήριον
οὐδὲν διαφθείρασαν ἐν μήκει χρόνου·
οὐδ' οἶδα τέρψιν οὐδ' ἐπίψογον φάτιν
ἄλλου πρὸς ἀνδρὸς μᾶλλον ἢ χαλκοῦ βαφάς.
τοιόσδ' ὁ κόμπος, τῆς ἀληθείας γέμων,
οὐκ αἰσχρὸς ὡς γυναικὶ γενναίᾳ λακεῖν. (606-614)

But may he find, when he returns, his wife exactly as trustworthy
as when he left, watchdog of the house,
faithful to him, but hostile to his enemies,
and likewise, in respect to all other things, having destroyed
no seal in the length of his absence.
I do not know pleasure or reproachful rumor
in relation to another man, any more than I know the dipping of metal.
Such is my boast, full of the truth,
not shameful to proclaim, at least for a noble wife.

The emphatic placement of *γυναῖκα πιστήν* at the beginning of line 606 indicates the topic of her subsequent discourse: the trustworthy wife. Using the formula “watchdog of the house,” she claims to have maintained the household exactly as Agamemnon left it,¹⁷⁸ in terms of her emotional fidelity (608), her management of the house’s resources (609-610), and her sexual fidelity (611-612). These three categories broadly encompass the social expectations for a waiting wife, as articulated in the *Odyssey* and in later tragedies.¹⁷⁹ Clytemnestra claims to have managed the household better even than Penelope in one respect: she has kept their property and

¹⁷⁸ The combination of *-περ* and *οὖν* strengthen the pronoun and emphasize that she (and, by association, the house) is *exactly* the same. On the importance of keeping things in their proper place in the household, see the discussion of Odysseus’ bed in Chapter 2.

¹⁷⁹ See Chapter 2 for these expectations in the *Odyssey*.

resources safe, not removing a single seal from a storeroom or treasury.¹⁸⁰ The suitors' wasting of her house's resources caused Penelope to worry that she had not managed the household well in Odysseus' absence; Clytemnestra boasts that she has succeeded in all of these categories.¹⁸¹

Simon Goldhill (1984, 56-57) and Laura McClure (1999, 76-77) have pointed out, using different examples, that Clytemnestra's language in this passage is ambiguous, phrased so that it can be understood in two contradictory ways: that she is faithful (the primary reading), or that she is not (the secondary reading, with hindsight), since she will turn out to be quite skilled at "dipping bronze" (χαλκοῦ βαφάς, 612) in her husband's blood (cf. ὡς ἔβαψεν Αἰγίσθου ξίφος, *Cho.* 1011).¹⁸² McClure argues that the speech genre of the "boast" (κόμπος, 613) is more appropriate for the Homeric hero than for the loyal wife, and claims that this speech "depicts Clytemnestra as alternately establishing and subverting the ethos of a dutiful and loyal wife by means of her verbal activities."¹⁸³ Indeed, in hindsight, when Clytemnestra boasts above Agamemnon's dead body that she has slaughtered her worst enemy and rejoices in her victory, the Chorus notes that her speech is inappropriately bold: "We are amazed at your tongue, how

¹⁸⁰ Doors to storerooms were often both locked and sealed with clay, which was imprinted with the seal of the owner (cf. *Lys.* 1197-1199, Hdt. 2.38.3, Pl. *Leg.* 954a-b). For more discussion of this practice, see Austin and Olson (2004) *ad* 415. The scholiast, however, as Denniston and Page (1957) *ad* 609 note, glosses σημαντήριον as σφραγίδα τῆς πρὸς ἄνδρα εὐνής. The seal may also, therefore, have sexual connotations. McClure (1999) 77 argues, "the term πιστή in conjunction with σημαντήριον underscores the integrity of the chaste female body, which should be bounded, uncorrupted, and impenetrable, as the feminine complement of the physical inviolability of the adult citizen male in classical Athens. The fact that the verb διαφθείρω later becomes the technical term for adulterous seduction in Attic oratory further contributes to the ambiguity."

¹⁸¹ The Watchman, however, plants a seed that encourages doubt about Clytemnestra's claims in this speech, as mentioned earlier: κλαίω τότ' οἴκου τοῦδε συμφορὰν στένων / οὐχ ὡς τὰ πρόσθ' ἄριστα διαπονυμένον, ("I grieve for the misfortune of this house, since it is not being managed in the best way, as it was before," 18-19.)

¹⁸² On the dying process for bronze that Clytemnestra refers to here, see Holm (2012) 493-495, who argues that the purple color afforded by the dying process also hints at Clytemnestra's bloody intentions.

¹⁸³ McClure (1999) 77.

bold-mouthed it is, uttering such boastful speech over your husband” (θαυμάζομέν σου γλώσσαν, ὡς θρασύστομος, / ἦτις τοιόνδ’ ἐπ’ ἀνδρὶ κομπάζεις λόγον, 1399-1400). Yet it is crucial for her deception of the Herald and of Agamemnon that she establish her position as dutiful and faithful wife convincingly; in praising herself in this speech, Clytemnestra hopes to secure the reputation (κλέος) of a faithful wife.¹⁸⁴ From the vantage point of the audience, who may suspect that she is lying because of their knowledge of the story from the *Odyssey* and hints from the Watchman and Chorus, her words may have a double meaning, but from the vantage points of the Herald and of Agamemnon, her words fit an expected narrative.¹⁸⁵ In part, perhaps, because they want to believe it, the Herald and Agamemnon are deceived by this boast.

Likewise, in her deceptive welcome speech to Agamemnon, Clytemnestra calls attention to the anxieties and hardships that she faced in his absence, mimicking a subgenre of speech by waiting wives that details the difficulty of their lives while their husbands are away from home.¹⁸⁶ Clytemnestra adopts many of her topics in this speech from Penelope’s speeches in the *Odyssey*, so that scholars have long identified, in Desmond Conacher’s (1987, 33) words, a “Penelope-tone” in Clytemnestra’s speech. Clytemnestra first tells a lie in this speech, therefore, by claiming to speak directly from experience about her difficult life (δύσφορον...βίον, 859)

¹⁸⁴ As discussed in Chapter 2, Penelope believes that her κλέος as a waiting wife would be heightened by Odysseus’ successful return (*Od.* 18.254-255). Agamemnon contrasts the good κλέος of Penelope with the bad κλέος of Clytemnestra at the end of the poem (*Od.* 24.192-198)

¹⁸⁵ Pace Raeburn and Thomas (2011) 133, who think that, by the end of this speech, “even the Herald might sense that she ‘doth protest too much.’”

¹⁸⁶ Scholarship has recently attempted to categorize types of women’s speech in tragedy, identifying gender-specific lexical markers (e.g. oaths and obscenities, Sommerstein 1995, interjections and pathetic expressions, McClure 1995, and forms of address, Dickey 1996), verbal-genres (e.g. gossip, lamentations, and seductive persuasion, McClure 1999, and song, Chong-Gossard 2003, Chong-Gossard 2008), and rhetorical techniques (e.g. shifts in approach when addressing single-sex or mixed-sex groups, Mossman 2001, silence, Montiglio 2000, and the manipulation of oaths, Fletcher 2003 and 2007).

while her husband was away at Troy, “not having learned it from others” (οὐκ ἄλλων πάρα / μαθοῦσα, 859-860). Because Clytemnestra wishes to deceive Agamemnon by duplicitously rehearsing the complaints of the waiting wife, her speech provides the most comprehensive and compact example of this discourse in extant Greek literature. In this performance Clytemnestra distills the waiting wife’s anxieties and bridges the gap between Penelope’s experiences in the *Odyssey* and a discourse of waiting wives that appears in later tragedies. As a result, this speech provides an introduction to many of the topics that will be addressed in later chapters.

Clytemnestra’s first complaint, the wife’s loneliness during her husband’s absence, is marked by τὸ μὲν...πρῶτον: τὸ μὲν γυναῖκα πρῶτον ἄρσενος δίχα / ἦσθαι δόμοις ἐρήμων ἔκπαγλον κακόν (“first of all, it is a terrible evil for a wife to sit at home alone without her husband,” 861-862).¹⁸⁷ In the *Odyssey* and in later tragedies, the wife’s loneliness is exacerbated by either a literal or a figurative exile, which separates the wife from her family and friends: in the *Odyssey*, Penelope is confined to the upper rooms of her house, besieged by the suitors (*Od.* 1.328-336); in the *Trachiniae*, Deianeira is exiled in Trachis away from both her and her husband’s family (Soph. *Trach.* 38-42). Megara’s isolation in Euripides’ *Heracles* is aggravated by the murder of her father and brothers, when the usurper Lycus took the throne (Eur. *Her.* 31-34). A similar scenario is imagined in the *Agamemnon*: the Chorus reports that the people of Argos are hostile to the commanders of the army because of the war, and both the Chorus and Clytemnestra claim to fear a plot against the royal house (455-460, 883-884), which reflects the isolation of the royal household from the rest of society in Argos and its vulnerability.

¹⁸⁷ The hyperbaton in the line, separating γυναῖκα from its modifier ἐρήμων, emphasizes the concept of loneliness.

Clytemnestra pairs this first complaint closely with a second: the fear of receiving “malignant reports” (κληδόνας παλιγκότους, 863).¹⁸⁸ Over the next ten lines, Clytemnestra vividly describes the experience of receiving messenger after messenger falsely reporting wounds that Agamemnon received, and even his death (864-872). This complaint receives the longest expansion of any in Clytemnestra’s speech. Its prominence anticipates its importance in later tragedies, and reflects practical concerns about the difficulty of learning trustworthy news about the army on campaign.¹⁸⁹ Clytemnestra’s earlier beacon speech (281-316) indicates that she commands greater control over information about the war than typical waiting wives, and hints at the gap between Clytemnestra’s “good wife” speech and the reality of the situation in Argos.¹⁹⁰

As discussed in Chapter 2, Penelope develops a skeptical outlook in order to protect herself against the barrage of false reports that she receives, even from Odysseus himself, who

¹⁸⁸ Raeburn and Thomas (2011) lii point to Clytemnestra’s repeated use of this phrase in this speech as evidence of the “sinister ambiguity” in her use of language: “Here κληδόνες is itself a malignant word; behind its superficial sense in the context – ‘rumours’ – lurks the sense ‘ominous words’. Clytemnestra is inventing rumours about Agamemnon’s extreme suffering, in the knowledge that by stating them she is ominously spelling his actual death.”

¹⁸⁹ Hdt. 5.87, in which a group of Athenian wives kills the sole survivor of a military disaster because he reported their husbands’ deaths, testifies to a broader anxiety about wives of veterans and their reactions to news of their absent husbands.

¹⁹⁰ On the geography of the beacon sites, see Quincey (1963). On sexual imagery in Clytemnestra’s beacon speech, see Maxwell-Stuart (1973). Gantz (1977) 28 argues that the fires of the beacons “symbolize the destructive aspects of vengeance.” Tracy (1986) 257 argues that the beacon signals would have carried negative overtones through their association with “the signals used by the Persian commanders during the great invasion of 480 to announce Athens’ capture to an expectant Persian court.” Burian and Shapiro (2003) 193 *ad* 320-59 connect the fire of the beacons to the flames that ravaged Priam’s city and will now descend, destructively, upon Agamemnon’s house. Raeburn (2011) *ad* 281-316 suggests ominous allusions to female treachery, ambushes, and the deaths of kings in each of the toponyms in Clytemnestra’s speech. Taplin (2011) claims that the beacon speech demonstrates Clytemnestra’s military knowledge. These readings show the mastery of geography, language, and information displayed in Clytemnestra’s speech, in addition to hinting forebodingly at Clytemnestra’s intentions to murder Agamemnon.

tests her in disguise (*Od.* 14.126-130, 19.185-202). False reports also contribute significantly to the plots of the two tragedies that I will discuss in subsequent chapters: in the *Trachiniae*, the messenger Lichas lies about the captive women who precede Heracles' return (Soph. *Trach.* 225-496), and in *Heracles*, Megara also receives a false report from Eurystheus' heralds that Heracles has died (Eur. *Her.* 551-553). Though Clytemnestra's description of these false reports may seem exaggerated, the pervasiveness of this trope in *nostos* plays, and the importance allotted to it in these narratives, indicate that false reports probably constituted a significant fear for waiting wives, who had little access to reliable news.¹⁹¹

Lonely and bombarded by reports of Agamemnon's death, Clytemnestra claims that she often despaired so much that she attempted suicide. This third complaint emphasizes the potentially dire consequences of these malignant reports when not treated with skepticism:

τοιῶνδ' ἑκατι κληδόνων παλιγκότων
πολλὰς ἄνωθεν ἀρτάνας ἐμῆς δέξης
ἔλυσαν ἄλλοι πρὸς βίαν λελημμένης. (874-876)

Because of such hostile reports as these,
others released many nooses from my neck from up above,
when I was taken down by force.

Since elsewhere this topic is closely associated with the wife's desire to avoid being married off to another man, Clytemnestra intends to give Agamemnon a false impression of her faithfulness by describing her suicide attempts. In the *Odyssey*, Penelope prays for a quick death from

¹⁹¹ A recent report in the *Journal of Family Life* provides confirmation of a similar concern among contemporary veterans' wives: "The most common problem experienced by over 33% of respondents during pre-deployment was untrue rumors; these are often rumors about military men (including aspects of the upcoming deployment) or other wives [...] Rumors continued to be a challenge for nearly half of respondents during deployment" (Easterling and Knox 2010).

Artemis, the chaste goddess, so that she will not have to marry one of the suitors (*Od.* 20.79-82; cf. 18.201-205).

A practical concern for waiting wives is the safety of their children. Clytemnestra uses this concern to cover up the true motives behind removing Orestes to the house of a guest-friend, claiming that her suicide attempts, the possibility of Agamemnon's death at Troy, and the danger of civil unrest made Argos too risky an environment in which to raise their son (877-886).

Children also provide a physical reminder of the absent husband; as a result, the wife's feelings about her husband and his return are often reflected in the way that she talks about her children.

Clytemnestra claims, for example, that Orestes is the "guardian" of her and Agamemnon's pledges to one another (ἐμῶν τε καὶ σῶν κύριος πιστωμάτων, 878). This sentiment both

conceals and hints at the broken trust implied by Orestes' absence. By contrast, Penelope's

concern for Telemachus' welfare demonstrates her continued concern for Odysseus despite his long absence (cf. e.g. *Od.* 4.703-705). Another faithful wife, Megara, wants her children to die

heroically as a credit to their father's valor, showing that she values, perhaps too highly, this

aspect of her husband's character (*Eur. Her.* 290-294). Deianeira provides a more ambivalent

example; she complains that Heracles, like an absentee landlord, sees his children only when he

"sows" them, and then leaves, a complaint that exemplifies Deianeira's feelings of neglect and

uncertainty in her marriage (*Soph. Trach.* 31-35).

When she goes on to describe the effect of Agamemnon's absence on her own wellbeing

(ἔμοιγε, 887), Clytemnestra introduces the fifth complaint of waiting wives: her experience of

constant weeping, especially at night, insomnia, and bad dreams (887-894). At night in particular

the wife's anxieties worsen, since night was the time she had previously spent with her husband,

and is therefore the time when his absence is most tangible. Penelope details her own wakeful

nights and evil dreams at *Odyssey* 20.83-87, and Deianeira describes the “toil” (πόνον, 30) that night after night brings in. Clytemnestra claims actually to see (ὁρῶσα, 894) Agamemnon’s sufferings in dreams, rather than merely hearing of them in reports. Though the content of her dreams is somewhat different, Penelope describes a similarly torturous dream experience at *Od.* 20.87-90. She also voices her anxieties about the household and the suitors in a dream about geese that she relates to beggar-Odysseus in Book 19, discussed in Chapter 2 (*Od.* 19.535-553). As recorded in the *Libation Bearers* and in Sophocles’ *Electra*, Clytemnestra is eventually tortured by nightmares as a consequence of her murder of Agamemnon (Aesch. *Cho.* 523-539, Soph. *El.* 417-423).¹⁹² Her parody of the waiting wife’s anxious dreams, in which wives experience their husband’s trauma firsthand, ironically becomes a reality for her after she murders her husband.

Also revealing is the only concern voiced by waiting wives in later tragedies that Clytemnestra omits in this speech: fear of the husband’s sexual infidelity. Sophocles’ Deianeira and Hermione, in Euripides’ *Andromache*, fear that their husbands may prefer concubines that they won in war to their legitimate wives. Deianeira protests that she cannot tolerate sharing her marriage with another woman (Soph. *Trach.* 543-546), a sentiment that Hermione echoes with disgust (Eur. *And.* 177-180). Clytemnestra omits mention of this *topos* because her rhetorical strategy demands deflecting suspicions of sexual infidelity, as she herself has committed adultery with Aegisthus.¹⁹³ Yet later in the play, she hurls insult after insult at the dead Cassandra,

¹⁹² On Clytemnestra’s dreams in the trilogy as signifiers of her changing position from power to loss of power, see George (2001).

¹⁹³ There may be a hint of her adultery in her opening remark: “I am not ashamed to tell you about my love for my husband,” which can also be rendered “I am not ashamed to tell you about my man-loving ways” (οὐκ αἰσχυνοῦμαι τοὺς φιλόνορας τρόπους / λέξαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς, 856-857). Goldhill (1984) 89 points out that αἰσχύνεσθαι, when used of a woman, normally refers to her sexual behavior. Earlier in

revealing her hatred for her husband's concubine (1438-1443).¹⁹⁴ Because the concubine's survival, as Ruth Scodel (1998) has shown, depends upon blurring the distinction between rape and a consensual relationship approximating marriage, these women appear as significant rivals to the legitimate wife.¹⁹⁵ As war prizes, too, concubines symbolize the war that took the legitimate wife's husband away and changed their relationship; Agamemnon introduces Cassandra to Clytemnestra as a "gift of the army" (στρατοῦ δῶρημα, 955), marking the association between concubine and army life.¹⁹⁶

Finally, the ending of Clytemnestra's speech, in which she heaps praise upon Agamemnon as the savior of her household (895-901), also anticipates a belief sometimes held by waiting wives: that the return of their husband will bring an end to the family's troubles. One of the laudatory phrases that Clytemnestra chooses, comparing Agamemnon to "land appearing to sailors beyond expectation" (καὶ γῆν φανείσαν ναυτίλοις παρ' ἐλπίδα, 900) recalls the reverse simile at *Od.* 23.231-240: ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἂν ἀσπᾶσιος γῆ νηχομένοισι φανήη ("as when welcome land appears to swimmers, *Od.* 23.233).¹⁹⁷ The *Odyssey* concludes with this positive

the play, as McClure (1999) 78 notes, the Chorus uses the same adjective, φιλάνωρ, to describe the traces that Helen left in Menelaus' bed (ὠδὸν λέχος καὶ στίβοι φιλάνορες, 411).

¹⁹⁴ See McCoskey (1998) 51 on Clytemnestra's refusal to recognize Cassandra as a victim of war and repeated sexual assaults, who is constrained by her status as a slave to Agamemnon.

¹⁹⁵ Käppel (1998) 169 argues that Agamemnon's erotic liaisons with Chryseis and Cassandra, in Clytemnestra's mind, provide not only a reason for Agamemnon's murder, but also legitimation for Clytemnestra's adultery with Aegisthus. I think, by contrast, that wives expected their husbands to engage in erotic liaisons while at war; the real insult, to Clytemnestra and other tragic wives, is the husband's decision to bring a concubine back with him.

¹⁹⁶ Concubines embody the fascination that war continues to exert over some soldiers after their return. One wife of a Vietnam veteran speaks figuratively of Vietnam as a female rival: "I'm also afraid that someday my husband's depression will engulf him – that I will lose him entirely to that sad far-away look in his eyes, to that 'other woman' – Vietnam" (Matsakis 1996, xviii).

¹⁹⁷ On this reverse simile and its larger context, see Foley (1978) and the discussion in Chapter 2.

image of the husband's reunion with his wife: both have suffered during their time apart, and each recognizes the other's suffering, which allows a peaceful transition from the hardships of deployment to life together at home. Tragedy, as opposed to epic, expresses awareness that the soldier's return brings a new set of problems that the family must also confront. As she later proclaims, Clytemnestra in fact views Agamemnon as her enemy, her "abuser" (λυμαντήριος, 1438), not her savior.¹⁹⁸ Another tragic waiting wife, Megara, welcomes her husband as "not second to Zeus the Savior for us" (Eur. *Her.* 520-522), only to watch him murder their children, and then be murdered herself soon after.

Clytemnestra's deceptive welcome speech represents the only time in epic or in tragedy that the majority of the waiting wife's concerns are collected together in one speech. Overdoing her rehearsal of the experiences of the waiting wife, as she overdoes her praise of Agamemnon at the end of the speech, she incorporates all the topics that later become common to this discourse, or subgenre, of women's speech. By fashioning a single speech composed of topics gleaned from that exemplary waiting wife, Penelope, Clytemnestra conceals her motives and promotes an image of herself as the faithful guardian of her house. Though Agamemnon objects to her excessive praise, he does recognize the image that she projects; he responds to her speech with the address: "Offspring of Leda, guardian of my house, you have spoken in a way suitable to my absence" (Λήδας γένεθλον, δωμάτων ἐμῶν φύλαξι, / ἀπουσία μὲν εἶπας εἰκότως ἐμῆ, 914-915). In the next line, he sarcastically clarifies that her speech has been like his absence mainly

¹⁹⁸ Others, including Raeburn and Thomas (2011) *ad* 1438-1439, think that the woman mentioned in κείται γυναικὸς τῆσδ' ὁ λυμαντήριος (1436) is Cassandra. In that case, Clytemnestra still characterizes Agamemnon as unfaithful and an abuser of other women, if not herself.

in its excessive length.¹⁹⁹ Yet the speech is also “suitable” (εἰκότως, 915) to his absence in its accurate portrayal of a wife’s complaints about life at home while her husband is away.²⁰⁰ In this speech, Clytemnestra uses her understanding of the concerns and hardships of the waiting wife to persuade Agamemnon to enter the house without suspecting her real intentions.

The hostile watchdog

Although Agamemnon does not see through Clytemnestra’s deception, Cassandra does.

She compares Clytemnestra, in her prophesies to the Chorus, again to a dog:

νεῶν δ’ ἀπαρχος Ἰλίου τ’ ἀναστάτης
οὐκ οἶδεν οἷα γλώσσα μισητῆς κυνός,
λέξασα κάκτεινασα φαιδρόνους, δίκην
ἄτης λαθραίου τεύξεται κακῆ τύχη. (1227-1230)

The commander of the ships and destroyer of Troy
does not know what sort of hateful dog’s tongue,
after speaking and with a cheerful expression extending her speech,
will, by an evil fortune, make for herself retribution of secret ruin.

The text here is difficult,²⁰¹ but it is clear enough that Cassandra compares Clytemnestra’s deceptive welcome speech to the fawning, shameless “speech” of a dog. Such imagery, contrasting Clytemnestra’s “cheerful expression” (φαιδρόνους, 1229) with the “secret ruin” (ἄτης λαθραίου, 1230) that she engineers, recalls the Chorus’ warning to Agamemnon not to be fooled by bright eyes and fawning affection (795-798). Cassandra’s characterization corresponds

¹⁹⁹ See Micheline (1974) for a discussion of this phrase (μακρὰν γὰρ ἐξέτεινας, 916) and the history of its interpretation. Many scholars have seen Agamemnon’s comment as evidence of the couple’s open hostility to each other, but Micheline counters that comments like this one in tragedy function as subtle stage directions, which flag a transition from a *rhesis* to another kind of speech.

²⁰⁰ εἰκότως might also suggest to a contemporary Athenian the rhetorical practice of forming arguments based upon probability (*eikos*). This connection would emphasize the self-consciously rhetorical nature of Clytemnestra’s speech.

²⁰¹ See Raeburn and Thomas (2011) *ad* 1228-30 on the difficulties of these lines. I have followed the second approach listed in their description, and have changed the punctuation in Page’s text accordingly.

to the portrayal of Clytemnestra throughout the play as a watchdog who has become hyper-vigilant, turning against Agamemnon in the defense of her home and using deceit to trap him. It also indicates another association with dogs found in the Homeric poems: their shamelessness.²⁰² Clytemnestra's pursuit of revenge bestializes her, distancing her from the typical waiting wife she describes so movingly in her deceptive welcome speech.

Clytemnestra's stage entrances and exits also indicate that she exercises an unusual amount of power in the home and in the *polis*. In the first episode she establishes her unusual control and near-omniscience about the army at Troy through her beacon speech and her prophetic speech about the fall of Troy. In the second episode, her abrupt entrance and exit, before the Herald can enter the house or provide her with any information, and her speech, which gives the impression that she knows what has happened onstage in her absence, extends the impression of her control and omniscience. Her stage entrances and exits show that, like a vigilant watchdog, she controls the threshold of her home so that no other character or information passes through it without her knowledge and consent.²⁰³

This hyper-vigilance even toward associates of Agamemnon like the Herald does not make the house of Clytemnestra appear an especially welcoming place, and prefigures Clytemnestra's manipulation of the threshold during her reception of Agamemnon. In this famous scene, she

²⁰² On the association between *κύων* and *ἀναιδής* in the Homeric poems, see Graver (1995) 45-46 and Franco (2014) 7-16 *et passim*. At *Od.* 11.424, Agamemnon calls Clytemnestra *κυνῶπις* for the shamelessly neglectful way that she treats his dead body. Dog metaphors are applied far more to women in the Homeric poems than to men, since Greek misogynistic thinking held women to be more morally weak and shameless than men.

²⁰³ On Clytemnestra's command of the stage, see Taplin (1977) 300. As Taplin (1977) 307 also points out, Clytemnestra is the only character who uses the door up until Agamemnon's entrance, which happens under her supervision. Aegisthus similarly emerges under her watch. The only character who uses the door without Clytemnestra's supervisory presence is Cassandra.

persuades Agamemnon to trample on finely embroidered cloth as he enters the house, despite his protests that such an entrance does not befit a mortal man (922-924).²⁰⁴ This request to trample on the house's finery contradicts Clytemnestra's previously expressed concern for preserving their wealth (609-610). Agamemnon, even after he has given in, states concern for the material loss to his household that is risked with the gesture:

πολλή γὰρ αἰδῶς δωματοφθορεῖν ποσὶν
φθειρόντα πλούτον ἀργυρωνήτους θ' ὑφάς. (948-949)

For I feel great shame about ruining the house with my feet,
destroying its wealth and woven goods bought with silver.

In addition to “subjugating” Agamemnon in this scene,²⁰⁵ Clytemnestra demonstrates symbolically that he also ruins the house by entering it, despoiling it of wealth as he despoiled homes at Troy. In her response to Agamemnon's αἰδῶς,²⁰⁶ Clytemnestra downplays the expense, claiming that they can easily remedy the loss (961-962). Yet the symbolic gesture is weightier than the monetary loss: in turning Agamemnon into the despoiler of his own home (δωματοφθορεῖν, 948), Clytemnestra depicts him as an enemy of the household (cf. her comparison with Priam, 935) at the same time that she claims he is the opposite (966-972). The

²⁰⁴ On this scene and on the questions of why Agamemnon yields to Clytemnestra, what kind of material he tramples, and what it signifies, see Fraenkel (1950) 441-442, Denniston and Page (1957) *ad* 931ff., Gundert (1960), Lloyd-Jones (1962) 195-197, Lanahan (1974), Neitzel (1977), Meridor (1987), Konishi (1989), Crane (1993), McClure (1996), Morrell (1996), Sailor and Stroup (1999), McNeil (2005) and Steiner (2010), among others.

²⁰⁵ Agamemnon remarks that he has been subjugated by Clytemnestra in agreeing to walk upon the embroidered clothing: ἐπεὶ δ' ἀκούειν σοῦ κατέστραμμαι τάδε, / εἴμ' ἐς δόμων μέλαθρα πορφύρας πατῶν (956-957).

²⁰⁶ On Agamemnon's lingering αἰδῶς, see Cairns (1993) 194-200, esp. 197: “he hopes to mitigate his offence by removing his shoes, but the effect of the persisting *aidōs* to which this gesture is a concession is to reveal that he is doing wrong and to contribute to the atmosphere of apprehension and tension which grows from this point until the murder is committed.”

scene figures Agamemnon as the opponent of this watchdog of the house,²⁰⁷ foreshadowing events to come and Clytemnestra's defense of her actions in the remainder of the play.

Agamemnon's decision to risk φθόνος by walking on the purple cloth places him in the same position as Priam in a way that he does not anticipate.²⁰⁸ When Priam foresees the complete destruction of Troy in Book 22 of the *Iliad*, he imagines that he will be torn apart on his doorstep by his own watchdogs:

αὐτὸν δ' ἂν πύματόν με κύνες πρότησι θύρῃσιν
ὠμησται ἐρύουσιν, ἐπεὶ κέ τις ὀξείῃ χαλκῷ
τύψας ἢ βαλὼν ῥεθέων ἐκ θυμὸν ἔληται,
οὐς τρέφον ἐν μεγάροισι τραπεζῆας θυραωρούς,
οἳ κ' ἐμὸν αἶμα πίνοντες ἀλύσσοντες περὶ θυμῷ
κεῖσοντ' ἐν προθύροισι.²⁰⁹ (*Il.* 22.66-71)

But as for myself, finally, when someone strikes me
with a sharp sword or hits me and takes the life out of my limbs,
I will be torn apart on my threshold and eaten raw
by dogs whom I trained in my halls
as watchdogs to serve my table.
They, drinking my blood and maddened in their hearts,
will lie on my doorstep.

The main difference between these two rulers is that Agamemnon does not foresee this outcome at all. As a result, Agamemnon's figurative watchdog, his wife, does exactly what Priam fears will happen to him in defeat: she turns against her master.

The other woman

From Clytemnestra's point of view, Agamemnon attempts to bring another enemy into the house when he returns with a concubine. Since the problems that arise for a wife confronted by

²⁰⁷ See, especially, the battlefield language of 940-942.

²⁰⁸ As Lloyd-Jones (1962) 192 points out, the play makes many comparisons between Agamemnon and Priam: "Running right through the play we find a deliberate parallel between the fate of the house of Priam and the fate of the house of Atreus."

²⁰⁹ The text of the *Iliad* is taken from Munro and Allen's (1920) OCT edition.

her husband's concubine in her own home are not addressed in the *Odyssey*,²¹⁰ the confrontation between Clytemnestra and Cassandra in the *Agamemnon* becomes the prototype for scenes in several later *nostos* plays that address a similar conflict.²¹¹ This scene introduces topics that will receive further treatment in later plays: the portrayal of the concubine as a "faithful wife" and as a memento of war, the concubine's threatening youth and beauty, and her silence. Though the concubine, as a slave and a woman, is often the most vulnerable and disempowered character in the play, she is represented by the legitimate wife as posing a significant threat to both her and her household.²¹² Cassandra provides a paramount example of this threat: she is the only character in the *Agamemnon* who succeeds in defying Clytemnestra's commands.

Clytemnestra acknowledges the threat of the faithful concubine when she insults Cassandra's dead body with a variety of nasty epithets, including "faithful bed-fellow" (πιστὴ ξύνευνος, 1442), a phrase elsewhere applied to legitimate wives (cf. Pi. *Ol.* 1.88, of Hippodameia; Aesch. *Ag.* 1116, used by Cassandra of Clytemnestra; Soph. *Aj.* 1301; Eur. *Med.* 1001). The perception that the concubine is more faithful arises from her more vulnerable

²¹⁰ An aspect of Odysseus' restraint involves rejecting other sexual partners, at least for the long term: Odysseus rejects Calypso, Circe, and Nausicaa in favor of his legitimate wife, though he concedes that Calypso, being a goddess, is more beautiful than Penelope (*Od.* 5.215-224). The conflict between concubines and wives is foreshadowed briefly in the *Odyssey*: Cassandra is murdered by Clytemnestra, while Aegisthus murders Agamemnon (11.421-424).

²¹¹ See Chapter 4 and the discussion of Iole and Deianeira in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. See also the conflict between Andromache and Hermione in Euripides' *Andromache*. On tragic concubines, see Foley (2001) 87-105.

²¹² See Scodel (1998), mentioned above. In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon forthrightly admits that he prefers his concubine, Chryseis, to Clytemnestra (*Il.* 1.113-115). Euripides' *Andromache* provides the clearest expression of the wife's fear: Andromache remarks that Hermione "says that I make her childless with secret drugs and hated by her husband, and that I want to take her place in the house, forcibly casting her out of her marriage bed" (λέγει γὰρ ὡς νιν φαρμάκοις κεκορυμμένοις / τίθημι' ἄπαιδα καὶ πόσει μισουμένην, / αὐτὴ δὲ ναίειν οἶκον ἀντ' αὐτῆς θέλω / τόνδ', ἐκβαλοῦσα λέκτρα τάκεινης βίᾳ, Eur. *And.* 32-35). Andromache cannot persuade Hermione, who wants to kill her, that she was forced to have sex with Neoptolemus unwillingly (36-39). Hermione herself makes these complaints at 155-158.

circumstances: she is a slave, far from home, unaccompanied by other family members that might support her against her “husband.”²¹³ Agamemnon acknowledges Cassandra’s vulnerable position when he introduces her to his wife, urging Clytemnestra to welcome her “gently” (πρρευμενῶς, 950) into the house:

ἐκὼν γὰρ οὐδεὶς δουλίῳ χροῖται ζυγῷ·
αὕτη δὲ πολλῶν χρημάτων ἐξείρετον
ἄνθος, στρατοῦ δῶρημ’, ἐμοὶ ξυνέσπετο. (953-955)

For no one willingly subjects themselves to slavery’s yoke.
But this woman, the choice flower of great wealth,
gift of the army, has accompanied me.

He makes clear the power differential between Cassandra and his wife when he points out Cassandra’s unwilling status as a slave (953). In addition, he indicates that he views her as a memento of the war, a reminder of how the army honored him with the best prize of all their plunder. The epithet “choice flower” (ἐξείρετον ἄνθος, 954-955) points out, somewhat tactlessly, Cassandra’s beauty and her youth, intensifying the potential for conflict between this younger, perhaps more beautiful, woman and his wife.

The conflict between Cassandra and Clytemnestra unfolds in the fourth episode of the play after Agamemnon enters the house, beguiled by Clytemnestra’s masterful performance. The Chorus sings a song that ends with a premonition of Agamemnon’s death (1019-1033). Yet rather than re-emerge from the house triumphant, Clytemnestra comes back onstage in order to retrieve Cassandra and incorporate her murder into the revenge-plan. When she tries to persuade Cassandra to accept her new role as slave within her house and to come inside, Cassandra resists,

²¹³ As, for example, Menelaus supports his daughter, Hermione, against both Andromache and Neoptolemus by plotting the deaths of the concubine and her child in Euripides’ *Andromache* (515-522).

responding only with silence, the opposite of Clytemnestra’s powerful rhetoric.²¹⁴ At the end of their one-sided *agon*, Clytemnestra yields, leaving Cassandra alone onstage to prophesy to the Chorus in a moving *kommos* what will happen in the house of the Atreidae, and how these events relate to the curse on the house of Atreus (1072-1177). As a result, when Cassandra finally enters the house, she does so willingly, not at Clytemnestra’s command or subdued by her, as Agamemnon was (956-957), but with full knowledge of her fate, having sung her own dirge (1322-1323). Though she portrays herself as an “easy victim” (εὐμαροῦς χειρώματος, 1326) for Clytemnestra, she is also the only character who escapes the deception of Clytemnestra’s persuasive rhetoric, sees clearly what is happening, and understands that this incident is not isolated, but related to the house’s curse, which repeatedly involves adultery and the death of children.

Paradoxically, Cassandra’s silence is both evidence of her vulnerability and an effective form of resistance to Clytemnestra’s aggressive rhetoric.²¹⁵ Clytemnestra responds violently to her husband’s attempted introduction of a concubine into her home, treating both her husband and his concubine like enemies whose invasion is justly avenged with murder:

ἄτιμα δ’ οὐκ ἐπραξάτην,
ὁ μὲν γὰρ οὕτως, ἡ δὲ τοι κύκνου δίκην
τὸν ὕστατον μέλψασα θανάσιμον γόον
κεῖται φιλήτωρ τοῦδ’· ἐμοὶ δ’ ἐπήγαγεν
εὐνῆς παροψώνημα τῆς ἐμῆς χλιδῆ. (1443-1447)

²¹⁴ On Cassandra’s manipulation of silence, see Thalmann (1985) 228-229. Morgan (1994) 123 argues that Clytemnestra’s inability to persuade Cassandra “foreshadows her failure to persuade Orestes in *Choephoroi*.”

²¹⁵ Cassandra’s curse is to be isolated by her speech, since no one believes or understands her prophecies (cf. *Ag.* 1270-1274). On Cassandra’s role in the play and her vexed relationship with Apollo, see Leahy (1969), Knox (1979) 44-51, Schein (1982), Kovacs (1987), Feichtinger (1991), and Morgan (1994). Morgan (1994) 124 notes, “[Cassandra’s] ability to resist persuasion and her inability to persuade mirror each other and are grounded in her past actions.”

But they did not escape without due punishment,
for he is as he is, and she, like a swan,
having sung her final death lament
lies here, his lover. And to me she has brought
an added relish to the pleasure of my bed.

She dwells on the concubine's death more, in this passage, than the death of her husband, and grants Cassandra a more active role in her final moments: she sang her own lament, and is named, in the fashion of an epitaph,²¹⁶ Agamemnon's "lover" (φιλήτωρ τοῦδε, 1446), a word normally used for the active, male partner in a sexual relationship.²¹⁷ Clytemnestra portrays Cassandra not as a vulnerable slave woman, but as a legitimate threat, an adversary equal or even superior to her husband, who receives the violent fate that she deserves. Her parody of an epitaph, full of insults rather than praise, emasculates and belittles her husband, while elevating the threat of his concubine.

Resentment and revenge

The remainder of the play, after the murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra, shows the home transformed by trauma, and delineates Clytemnestra's feelings of betrayal, loss, rage, resentment, and bloodlust in response to her husband and his return, as opposed to the emotions and concerns of the "typical" waiting wife, which she so movingly and accurately portrayed in the first half of the play. Agamemnon's first attack upon his own household, in Clytemnestra's eyes, was his decision to sacrifice Iphigeneia for the war cause. Because of this betrayal and the

²¹⁶ Compare, for example, *IG I³ 1298*, found in the Syntagma rescue excavations in Athens, dating from c. 420-400 BC: Μετωπίδος [τόδ]ε [ση]- / μα, ἡ ζῶσα ἦν ἀγαθ[ή], / θανῶσα δὲ ἐνθ<ά>δε / κείται ("This is the grave of Metopis, who was a good woman in life, and in death lies here"). There are many more examples of this common formula in epitaphic inscriptions. Clytemnestra parodies the language of funerary epigrams.

²¹⁷ On the sexual implications of φιλήτωρ and the implicit emasculation of Agamemnon, see Raeburn and Thomas (2011) *ad* 1446.

loss of her child, she grows angry and desires for this wrong to be righted, a typical response of victims, who seek power through revenge;²¹⁸ when her daughter's death is not avenged, however, her anger becomes a kind of chronic resentment that leads Clytemnestra to sever all social ties and to lose restraint in her lust for revenge.

Clytemnestra repeatedly states, when justifying the murder, that she was reacting to a betrayal of what is morally right and that her actions, as a result, are just.²¹⁹ At the end of the triumphant speech she delivers over Agamemnon's corpse, for example, she envisions Agamemnon's blood, which has splattered her clothing and the ground, as a "proper" (πρεπόντως, 1395) libation, and her own actions as more than just (ὑπερδίκως, 1396):²²⁰

εἰ δ' ἦν πρεπόντως ὥστ' ἐπισπένδειν νεκρῷ,
τάδ' ἂν δικαίως ἦν, ὑπερδίκως μὲν οὖν·
τοσῶνδε κρατῆρ' ἐν δόμοις κακῶν ὄδε
πλήσας ἀραίων αὐτὸς ἐκπίνει μολῶν. (1395-1398)

But if it were possible to make proper libations over the corpse,
these things would be just, no, more than just!
For this man has filled a mixing-bowl in the house with so many
accursed crimes, which he himself, upon his return, drinks.

The metaphor of the mixing-bowl of crimes, which Agamemnon himself has filled and must now drink, admits no wrongdoing on Clytemnestra's part; instead, she sees the murder as exact recompense for Agamemnon's "accursed crimes" (κακῶν... ἀραίων, 1397-1398). The adjective ἀραίων recalls the Chorus' description of Iphigeneia's sacrifice: she was bridled "to

²¹⁸ On revenge as a way for victims of violence to regain a sense of personal power and integrity, a stable identity, see Keyishian (1995) 2. After the traumatic loss of her daughter, Clytemnestra rebuilds her identity around her role as avenger.

²¹⁹ On Clytemnestra's paradoxical defense that the murder of her husband is just on the grounds of kin-murder, which she also committed, see Neuburg (1991).

²²⁰ ὑπερδίκως is ambiguous, as it may mean "more than just," or "beyond what is just." On Clytemnestra's perversion of sacrificial ritual, see Zeitlin (1965).

restrain speech that might curse the house” (κατασχέιν / φθόγγον ἀραίων οἴκοις, 236-237).

The adjective also relates these crimes to the larger theme of the house’s curse (cf. τίς ἄν γονὰν ἀραίων ἐκβάλοι δόμων; 1565).²²¹

Agamemnon’s violation of *themis* is marked in the description of Iphigeneia’s sacrifice in the *parodos*, which provides an important context for Clytemnestra’s violent response. The Chorus directly quotes Agamemnon’s deliberations about whether or not to sacrifice his daughter. Deciding to commit the crime, he invokes *themis*, “what is right,” to justify his actions:

“παυσανέμου γὰρ θυσίας
παρθενίου θ’ αἵματος ὄρ-
γᾶ περιόργω σφ’ ἐπιθυ-
μείν θέμις. εὖ γὰρ εἶη.” (214-217)

“That they should desire with excessive passion
a sacrifice to calm the winds
and a virgin’s blood
is morally right. May it be well.”

Agamemnon’s startling redefinition of *themis* indicates that he has lost sight of what is right and wrong, betraying his responsibilities to his family in favor of his responsibilities to the army (σφε, 216).²²² In their narrative commentary on this scene, the Chorus indicates that Agamemnon’s decision in fact violates *themis*. They characterize Agamemnon’s mind as veering away from what is right to what is “impious, impure, unholy,” (δυσσεβῆ...ἄναγνον ἀνίερον,

²²¹ On Clytemnestra’s appeal to the curse on the house as part of her defense, see Neuburg (1991), who argues against the position, commonly taken by other critics (e.g. Fraenkel 1950, 678, 694; Taplin 1978, 143; Michellini 1979), that Clytemnestra grows in her understanding of the role of the house’s curse in her vengeance over the course of the play. This passage could be used to support his arguments – Clytemnestra acknowledges the curse at this early stage of her “defense.” O’Daly (1985) 6 also argues against a “psychological change” in Clytemnestra.

²²² On Agamemnon’s redefinition of *themis*, see Edwards (1977) 25. Smith (1980) 44 argues that Justice in the play is “dark and frightening” and “leaves its agents as guilty as its victims.” Ewans (1975) 27 argues that σφε refers not to the army (“they”), but to Artemis (“she”).

219-220), and state that “from that point on he turned to a mindset that would dare anything” (τόθεν / τὸ παντότολμον φρονεῖν μετέγνων, 220-221). As the Chorus’ complex *parados* shows, the notion of *themis* in the play is complicated, as waging a war to punish transgressors results in further violations of what is right and requital for those violations, as agent becomes victim.

Clytemnestra reacts to the betrayal of what is right in the sacrifice of her daughter by developing an “us against them” mentality and by giving in to an insatiable desire for revenge. Agamemnon becomes an absolute enemy to her, whereas his enemy, Aegisthus, becomes her absolute ally.²²³ Clytemnestra demonstrates this polarized thinking when she mentions Aegisthus for the first time, contrasting him with her husband:

καὶ τήνδ’ ἀκούεις γ’ ὀρκίων ἐμῶν θέμιν·
 μὰ τὴν τέλειον τῆς ἐμῆς παιδὸς Δίκην,
 Ἄτην Ἐρινύν θ’, αἰσι τόνδ’ ἔσφαξ’ ἐγώ,
 οὐ μοι φόβου μέλαθρον ἐλπὶς ἐμπατεῖ
 ἕως ἂν αἴθη πῦρ ἐφ’ ἐστίας ἐμῆς
 Αἰγισθος, ὡς τὸ πρόσθεν εὐφρονῶν ἐμοί·
 οὗτος γὰρ ἡμῖν ἀσπίς οὐ σμικρὰ θράσους.
 κεῖται γυναικὸς τῆσδ’ ὁ λυμαντήριος,
 Χρυσηίδων μείλιγμα τῶν ὑπ’ Ἴλιῳ. (1431-1439)

This also you hear, this righteousness of my oath:
 by Justice fulfilled for my child,
 by Ate and Erinys, to whom I myself sacrificed this man,
 for me expectation does not tread in the house of fear
 so long as Aegisthus warms the fire at my hearth,
 loyal to me as before.
 For we have no slight shield of confidence in him.
 But here lies the man who abused his wife [or this woman],
 charmer of Chryseises at Troy.

²²³ Regarding Achilles’ lack of concern for the troubles of his fellow Greeks, Shay (1994) 25 remarks, “After betrayal of *themis* in warfare, an us-against-them mentality takes hold in which everyone, no matter how close before, is either an absolute ally or an absolute enemy. This simplification and shrinkage of loyalties flows directly from the betrayal of “what’s right.” Clytemnestra’s perception of a betrayal of *themis* in the sacrifice of her daughter results in a similar mentality. On the ironic play on words for friends and enemies in the *Oresteia*, see Michelini (1979) 156-157.

Repeating her assertion under oath that her actions are right and just (θέμν, 1431), Clytemnestra portrays Aegisthus, mentioned for the first time here, as the legitimate master of her household: he lights the fire at its hearth (1435-1436). He also makes her feel safe, providing a shield of confidence (1437), whereas she calls Agamemnon her “abuser,” using strong language usually used of a rapist (cf. *Cho.* 764, of Aegisthus, Eur. *Hipp.* 1068, Eur. *Bacch.* 354).²²⁴ In Clytemnestra’s opinion, Aegisthus is completely good, whereas Agamemnon is completely bad.

Clytemnestra severs both family and other social ties as a result of this perceived betrayal by her husband. In addition to viewing her legitimate husband as her worst enemy, she ceases to care about her other living children, Orestes and Electra.²²⁵ In the *Choephoroe*, Electra describes the neglect that results from Clytemnestra’s severing of family ties:²²⁶

πεπραμένοι γὰρ νῦν γέ πως ἀλώμεθα
 πρὸς τῆς τεκούσης, ἄνδρα δ’ ἀντηλλάξατο
 Αἴγισθον, ὅσπερ σοῦ φόνου μεταίτιος.
 κἀγὼ μὲν ἀντίδουλος, ἐκ δὲ χρημάτων
 φεύγων Ὀρέστης ἐστίν, οἱ δ’ ὑπερκόπως
 ἐν τοῖσι σοῖς πόνοισι χλίουσιν μέγα. (132-137)

For now we are like outcasts, I suppose,
 sold by our mother, and she took in exchange a husband,
 Aegisthus, who was actually an ally in your murder.
 And I myself am treated like a slave, and Orestes is in exile,
 separated from his property, while they, overstepping their bounds,
 luxuriate greatly in the fruits of your toil.

Although this neglect of her living children seems to contradict her concern for Iphigeneia, Clytemnestra’s withdrawal from family life corresponds to her constricted view of social

²²⁴ Daube (1939) 182 points out that, in a legal sense, Aegisthus, not Agamemnon, would be properly called λυμαντήριος.

²²⁵ Another child, Chrysothemis, is never mentioned in the *Oresteia* trilogy, though she appears as an important character in Sophocles’ *Electra*.

²²⁶ Several lines later Electra claims that Clytemnestra does not deserve the name of mother: ἐμή γε μήτηρ, οὐδαμῶς ἐπόνυμον / φρόνημα παισὶ δύσθεον πεπαμένη, *Cho.* 190-191.

connections resulting from her feelings of victimization and chronic resentment. Deeply betrayed, lost in grief, and bitterly angry, Clytemnestra replaces her entire family with one man, Aegisthus, who helps her right the perceived wrong against her. She rejects her other ties completely.

Clytemnestra also distances herself from the rest of society at Argos because of the loss of Iphigeneia. The Chorus responds to Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon by invoking the curses of the people (δημοθρούς τ' ἄρας, 1409), pointing out that with her actions Clytemnestra has alienated herself from the rest of the city:

ἀπέδικες ἀπέταμες; ἀπόπολις δ' ἔση,
μίσος ὄβριμον ἀστοίς. (1410-1411)

You cast them [=public opinion] aside, you cut them off? You will be banished from the city, strongly hated by the citizens.

The anaphora with the prefix ἀπο- in the first line underlines the extent to which Clytemnestra has separated herself from the rest of the community by committing this crime. She, however, claims to have distanced herself from her fellow citizens long before murdering Agamemnon, when she realized that they would not oppose Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice Iphigeneia:

νῦν μὲν δικάζεις ἐκ πόλεως φυγὴν ἐμοὶ
καὶ μίσος ἀστῶν δημόθρους τ' ἔχειν ἄρας,
οὐδὲν τότ' ἀνδρὶ τῷδ' ἐναντίον φέρων,
ὃς οὐ προτιμῶν, ὡσπερ εἰ βοτοῦ μόρον,
μήλων φλεόντων εὐπόκοις νομεύμασιν,
ἔθυσεν αὐτοῦ παῖδα, φιλτάτην ἐμοὶ
ὠδὴν', ἐπωδὸν Θρηγίων ἀημάτων.
οὐ τοῦτον ἐκ γῆς τῆσδε χρῆν σ' ἀνδρηλατεῖν
μασμάτων ἄποιν'; ἐπήκοος δ' ἐμῶν
ἔργων δικαστῆς τραχὺς εἶ. (1412-1421)

Now you judge that I have earned exile from the city,
the hatred of the citizens, and public curses,
but at that time you didn't bring any opposition to that man,
who, not setting any value by it, as if it was the death of a beast
when sheep are abundant in their fleecy herds,

he sacrificed his own child, my dearest
birth pang, as a charm for the Thracian winds.
Shouldn't you have driven him from this land
as punishment for his defilement? But when you witness
my deeds, you are a harsh judge.

Clytemnestra felt that the people of Argos had neglected justice when they did not exile Agamemnon for killing Iphigeneia. As a result, she no longer views them as legitimate judges of her own actions. Iphigeneia is mentioned here for the first time since the Chorus described her sacrifice in the *parodos*, and the word used to describe her, “birth pang” (ὠδῖνα, 1415), evokes both Clytemnestra’s pain as a mother in labor and the mental anguish that she has felt at her child’s loss.²²⁷

Such longterm feelings of betrayal, loss, and anger, which lead her to sever social ties, also prompt a desire for revenge that renders Clytemnestra inhuman and cruel. Her description of the murder of her husband emphasizes her own enjoyment of his violent death:

οὕτω τὸν αὐτοῦ θυμὸν ὀρμαίνει πεσὼν
κάκφυσιῶν ὀξειαν αἵματος σφαγὴν
βάλλει μ’ ἐρεμνῆ ψακάδι φοινίας δρόσου,
χαίρουσαν οὐδὲν ἥσσον ἢ διοσδότη
γάνει σπορητὸς κάλυκος ἐν λοχεύμασιν. (1388-1392)

In this way, having fallen, he gasped out his own soul,
and pouring out a sharp spurt of blood
he hits me with a dark shower of bloody dew,
which I enjoyed no less than sown corn enjoys
refreshing rain granted by Zeus when the fruit is setting.

²²⁷ ὠδίς, which literally refers to the pangs of labor, is also often used in tragedy to describe mental anxiety or anguish. In the *Choephoroe*, Electra uses the word to describe her panic when she sees her brother unexpectedly for the first time: πάρεστι δ’ ὠδίς καὶ φρενῶν καταφθορά (211). Morgan (1992) notes that this aspect of Clytemnestra’s defense (her maternal feelings) is foreshadowed by her metaphor of sowing at 1391-1392.

Agamemnon’s blood quenches Clytemnestra’s thirst for revenge. Her comments about Cassandra’s death, which “brought a sweet side-dish to the pleasure of [her] bed” (ἐμοὶ δ’ ἐπήγαγεν / εὐνῆς παροψώνημα τῆς ἐμῆς χλιδῆ, 1446-1447) also show that these murders give her great pleasure, like eating a luxurious dessert.²²⁸

The Chorus, shocked by Clytemnestra’s enjoyment of murder, believes that she has been maddened by bloodlust; they claim to see flecks of blood in her eyes (1428). Like Priam’s dogs (cf. *Il.* 22.66-71, quoted above), Clytemnestra is intoxicated by her bloody revenge. She claims, moreover, that this bloodlust (ἔρωσ ἀίματολοιχός, 1478) is nourished by the “spirit of this family” (δαίμονα γέννης τῆσδε, 1477). She even claims to embody this spirit herself:

αὐχεῖς εἶναι τόδε τοῦργον ἐμόν;
 <μὴ > μηδ’ ἐπιλεχθῆς²²⁹
 Ἄγαμεμνονίαν εἶναί μ’ ἄλοχον·
 φανταζόμενος δὲ γυναικὶ νεκροῦ
 τοῦδ’ ὁ παλαιὸς δορυμὸς ἀλάστωρ
 Ἄτρεως χαλεποῦ θοινατήρος
 τόνδ’ ἀπέτεισεν,
 τέλεον νεαροῖς ἐπιθύσας. (1497-1504)

You claim that this is my deed?
 <Don’t > nor deem
 me the wife of Agamemnon.
 No, the ancient and bitter avenger
 of Atreus, lord of a cruel feast,
 has taken the form of this corpse’s wife
 and paid him back, having sacrificed

²²⁸ Raeburn and Thomas (2011) *ad* 1446-1447 note the sexual undertones of this remark: “The word παροψώνημα is particularly apt, since it can mean a ‘bit-on-the-side,’ i.e. a lover (see Aristophanes fr. 191 παροψίς): Agamemnon intended Cassandra as his παροψώνημα in that sense, but Clytemnestra has reclaimed her as a source of pleasure for her *own* bed.” On the sexual undertones in Clytemnestra’s speech, see also Pulleyn (1997).

²²⁹ I have adopted Sommerstein’s (2008) version of the text here. He explains: “Clytaemestra first criticizes the chorus for believing that she (i.e. Agamemnon’s wife) is Agamemnon’s murderer, and then tells them not to believe that she (i.e. Agamemnon’s murderer) is Agamemnon’s wife; this contradiction is doubtless deliberate on the poet’s part, drawing attention (as the chorus will, more directly, in 1505-7) to the sheer incoherence of any attempt to deny her guilt” (Sommerstein 2008, 183 n. 320).

a full-grown victim in addition to the young ones.

In the act of revenge, Clytemnestra loses her identity as wife of Agamemnon, and becomes instead godlike, an avenging spirit.²³⁰ She loses her humanity altogether in her belief that she is above all human moral restraint in the pursuit of her revenge.

In her powerful, godlike state of bloodlust, Clytemnestra admits no wrong and imagines no repercussions for herself. The Chorus, which also connects Clytemnestra's revenge with the curse on the house, finally determines that the struggle is difficult to judge (δύσμαχα δ' ἐστὶ κρῖναι, 1561), since it involves an endless cycle of revenge much larger than the murder of one man. This small concession by the Chorus prompts Clytemnestra to recognize her own vulnerability. No longer identifying herself with the spirit, she offers to strike a deal with it, agreeing to remain content with her current lot if it leaves the family alone (1569-1576).²³¹ This bargain is born from her desire for self-preservation, but also demonstrates her recognition that she is a mortal member of this cursed house.²³² Unlike the spirit, she, as a mortal actor, is accountable for her deeds and vulnerable to reciprocal revenge. She realizes that she is now the plunderer and the killer referred to in the Chorus' pithy formulation of the revenge cycle: "the

²³⁰ Shay (1994) 84 writes that the berserker often feels like a god: "The berserker feels godlike in his power and acknowledges no limit to his power and invulnerability. He acknowledges no restraints of any kind. As beasts are beneath human restraints, gods are above them." Soldiers also refer to themselves remorsefully as animals after their berserking behavior is over. Lusting for revenge herself, Electra claims that she and Orestes are like wolves in their rage: λύκος γὰρ ὡστ' ὠμόφρων ἄσαντος ἐκ / ματρὸς ἐστὶ θυμός (*Cho.* 421-422). Cf. *Il.* 22.261-267.

²³¹ On Clytemnestra's shift in perspective over the course of the play, from embodying the *daimon* to bargaining with it, see Michelini (1979) 155: "The daimon, with which the queen was one at the moment of vengeance, later becomes an outside force, with which bargains must be made."

²³² Pace Neuburg (1991), who argues that divine responsibility for human affairs is not at issue in the trilogy.

plunderer is plundered, and the killer pays” (φέρει φέροντ’, ἐκτίνει δ’ ὁ καίνων, 1562).²³³

Though her realization does not absolve her of responsibility for the crime, it does make her seem more human, and thus more sympathetic, than she was in her state of bloodlust, simultaneously beast and god.

Aftermath

Any progress toward greater understanding of Clytemnestra’s disastrous actions is disrupted by the surprise entrance of Aegisthus at line 1577. Aegisthus shuts down Clytemnestra’s discussion with the Chorus, and exchanges insults with them until both sides take up arms – Aegisthus’ bodyguards swords, and the elderly Chorus members their staffs (1651-1652). At the end, Clytemnestra becomes the mediator, urging Aegisthus not to harm the elders, and the elders to go home (1654-1661). Yet the ending of the first play of the trilogy offers little in terms of resolution: the Chorus continues to insult Aegisthus and to portend future revenge, while Aegisthus and Clytemnestra remain confident in their control. The play ends with Clytemnestra’s dismissal of the Chorus’ words as “empty barkings” (ματαίων τῶνδ’ ὑλαγμάτων, 1672)²³⁴ and an affirmation of her joint-rule with Aegisthus: <ἐγὼ> / καὶ σὺ θήσομεν κρατοῦντε τῶνδε δωμάτων <καλῶς> (“You and I, controlling this house, will set things right,” 1672-1673).²³⁵

²³³ On this phrase, see Neitzel (1979c), who argues, against Hommel (1974), that this scene points out the clash between the Chorus’ view of Agamemnon as victim and Clytemnestra’s view of Agamemnon as a killer who is justly killed in return. The paradox of the revenge cycle is that both the Chorus and Clytemnestra are correct.

²³⁴ The dog imagery is thus extended to the end of the play, as the Chorus is compared to a useless guard-dog, all bark and no bite.

²³⁵ Michelini (1979) argues that Clytemnestra’s change of behavior at the end of the play is related to her desire to maintain the new status quo.

In the *Libation Bearers*, however, Clytemnestra is less assured of her control; as the Chorus of elderly captive women report, she is visited by “prophetic dreams” (ὄνειρόμαντις, 34) that make her paranoid and hyper-alert. Her libations at the beginning of the play are made in an attempt to assuage her paranoia, but as the Chorus says, “the guilty one” lives in a constant state of madness and sickness:

τὰ δ' αἵματ' ἐκποθένθ' ὑπὸ Χθονὸς τροφῶ
τίτας φόνος πέπηγεν οὐ διαρρῦδαν·
αἰανῆς ἄτα
διαφέρει τὸν αἴτιον
καὶ παναρκέτας νόσος.²³⁶ (66-70)

Blood that is drunk up by nurturing Earth
congeals as avenging gore that does not wash away;
perpetual madness,
along with complete sickness,
destroys the guilty.

The blood that Clytemnestra earlier spilled as a “proper libation” (Ag. 1395) now haunts her, as the Chorus depicts with a mixed legal and medical metaphor: the blood has congealed and will not wash away, like an official who presides over the guilty (τίτας, 67), making sure that the fine is paid.²³⁷ Clytemnestra realizes now that her crime will be avenged and waits for that day in fear.

Madness also plagues Orestes after he kills his mother, as depicted in the final play of the trilogy. He first seeks purification by Apollo at Delphi, but when his mother’s Furies continue to track him there, he flees to Athens, where he is recuperated through the justice system. The process of making his case before the judges and receiving a positive judgment allows Orestes to

²³⁶ The text here is corrupt, but the sense remains fairly clear. I have reproduced the emendations printed by Sommerstein (2008).

²³⁷ For more on the legal aspect of this metaphor, see Willetts (1953) 384.

recover from his madness and become a functional citizen. In a parallel process, the destructive, terrifying Furies are converted into deities that bring blessings to the city of Athens. Aeschylus locates in the civic sphere the recuperation of the individual affected by the trauma of war and revenge, whether it happens on the battlefield or in the home. This emphasis on the transformative civic power of Athens foreshadows the roles of Theseus and Athens in Euripides' *Heracles*, discussed in Chapter 5.

Clytemnestra, whose character dominates the trilogy even after she has been killed, challenges the reintegration and reincorporation of her husband into the home after war, casting him instead as the enemy. Yet Aeschylus is careful to present her as more than simply an evil woman who murders her husband in revenge; her articulation of the responsibilities, emotions, and concerns of the waiting wife provide valuable insight into actual women's experiences waiting at home in wartime. In addition, the resentment of the citizens of Argos places Clytemnestra's parallel resentment in perspective. Her resentment does not, however, justify her excessive revenge, but rather shows that the home front is deeply divided by the trauma of war, and that those wounds indefinitely repeat themselves, as the agent of "justice" becomes its victim.

Finally, while Orestes finds recuperation in the civic sphere, Clytemnestra, as a woman barred access to participation in civic life, would not have this option even if she should want it.²³⁸ Women at home who experience the trauma of war, through the death of loved ones or through abuse by their veteran husbands, often feel that there is nowhere to turn for help, and without support, resentment and bitterness can percolate for years, resulting in further injury to

²³⁸ On the misogynistic arc of the trilogy, see Zeitlin (1978).

themselves or others (though usually not as extreme as Clytemnestra's revenge).²³⁹ The *Oresteia* offers no solution for women in this position, though it condemns Clytemnestra's actions and shows how destructive unresolved feelings of betrayal, loss, and rage can be, as trauma begets trauma in the very place that should be synonymous with safety: the home.

²³⁹ For this feeling among contemporary wives of veterans, see Bannerman (2015) 158, who quotes a blog post for the *Huffington Post* by Torrey Shannon, wife of a veteran with PTSD: "We are furious at the cards we were dealt and indignant that such a horrible thing had to happen to our husbands in the first place. We are angry about the loss of the marriage we were supposed to have, and we never truly stop mourning. We're angry at the doctors who blow us off when we give our input, or the VA who puts him into a backlog... We hold a grudge against anybody who ever failed us as we tried to make sense of this chaos. We are also furious at ourselves, because we constantly feel like we're not doing enough to help." Matsakis (1996) 168 also observes, "Most of the women are angry. Some are in touch with their anger, others are not. Most have ambivalent feelings about their anger. On the one hand, they feel their anger is a legitimate response to being mistreated, unloved, and overburdened; on the other hand, since their partners suffered various hardships in Vietnam, they should be more understanding and patient. However, this pattern may change when a woman reaches midlife. Upon the reflection characteristic of this time of life, a woman may begin to both appreciate and resent what she has sacrificed for the sake of others or for the sake of her value system."

CHAPTER 4

“That ‘Other Woman’”:²⁴⁰

Deianeira in Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*

Many critics have pointed out the similarities between Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* and Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*: both plays feature a husband returning from battle, who dies entrapped by his wife in a woven garment, symbol of feminine *metis*.²⁴¹ In some passages, the *Trachiniae* appears to allude directly to the *Agamemnon*, as when Heracles describes the poisoned robe as “this woven garment of the Erinyes, which the daughter of Oeneus with guileful face has fixed upon me, thrown about my shoulders like a net, by which I am dying” (οἶον τόδ’ ἢ δολῶπις Οἰνέως κόρη / καθήψεν ὅμοις τοῖς ἐμοῖς Ἐρινύων / ὑφαντὸν ἀμφίβληστρον, ᾧ διόλλυμαι, 1050-1052).²⁴² The noun ἀμφίβληστρον, which means literally “something thrown around,” is used twice in the *Oresteia* to describe the garment that Clytemnestra used like a

²⁴⁰ The phrase “that ‘other woman’” comes from the wife of a Vietnam war veteran, quoted by Matsakis (1996, xviii): “Don’t ask me what it means to be a woman anymore. My life is too hard, and I’m too bitter, and too afraid of the anger and the pain inside me. I’m also afraid that someday my husband’s depression will engulf him – that I will lose him entirely to that sad far-away look in his eyes, to that ‘other woman’ – Vietnam.”

²⁴¹ See, for example, Müller (1904) 393-404, Errandonea (1927), Webster (1936) 164-171, Kapsomenos (1963) 39-114, Segal (1975) 38, (1994a), and (1999) 72-73, Parry (1986) 103-114, Garner (1990) 100-110, Levett (2004) 36, Mattison (2015) 12. On the motif of the deadly *peplos* in both plays, see Lee (2004) 262-273. On the connection between woven garments and feminine *metis* in Greek thought and literature, see Detienne and Vernant (1978) 299-300, Bergren (1983), Joplin (1984), and Lee (2004) 275-276.

²⁴² For other allusions, see Garner (1990) 100-110. The text of Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* is taken from the OCT edition of Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990).

fishing-net to trap Agamemnon in the bathtub (ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον, ὥσπερ ἰχθύων, Aesch. Ag. 1382; μέμνησο δ' ἀμφίβληστρον ὡς ἐκαίνισας, Aesch. Cho. 492). The description of the *peplos* sent by Deianeira as a “woven garment of the Erinyes” also alludes to Aegisthus’ description of Clytemnestra’s murderous garment at the end of the *Agamemnon*: ἰδὼν ὑφαντοῖς ἐν πέπλοις Ἐρινύων / τὸν ἄνδρα τόνδε κείμενον φίλως ἐμοί (“this man lying here in woven garments of the Erinyes is a dear sight to me,” 1580-1581).

Yet the differences between the two plays, particularly the contrasting lead characters, Clytemnestra and Deianeira, are striking.²⁴³ Clytemnestra carefully plans her husband’s murder; Deianeira, by contrast, does not intend to murder her husband, but makes a panicked, fatal mistake.²⁴⁴ Each wife’s treatment of her husband’s concubine is especially telling:²⁴⁵ whereas Clytemnestra views Cassandra as an added insult and therefore an added delicacy in her murderous banquet, Deianeira feels immediate sympathy for Iole and does not attempt to harm her, even after she discovers that she is her rival. This deliberate contrast, among others, shows

²⁴³ Indeed, some scholars have suggested that Sophocles’ *Deianeira* is a deliberate revision of Aeschylus’ *Clytemnestra*. See, for example, Ormand (1999) 55 and Mattison (2015) 12. Susanetti (2011) 47-48 compares *Deianeira* instead to *Penelope*.

²⁴⁴ The question of *Deianeira*’s intention has been hotly debated. Some think that she did intend to poison her husband, either consciously or unconsciously. For arguments to this effect, see Errandonea (1927), LaRue (1965), Hester (1980), Ryzman (1991), Gasti (1993), and Carawan (2000). Scott (1995) and (1997) argues that *Deianeira*’s unconscious mind knew exactly what she was doing and that she is, therefore, culpable. Faraone (1994) argues that *Deianeira* knew that there was poison in *Nessus*’ blood, but believed that it would function in small quantities as a love charm.

²⁴⁵ Kapsomenos (1963) 39 points out that *Iole*’s silence recalls *Cassandra*’s silence in her confrontation with *Clytemnestra*. Levett (2004) 76-77 suggests that this scene in the *Trachiniae* is modeled on the *Clytemnestra* and *Cassandra* scene in the *Agamemnon*, but with very different results. Mattison (2015) 13 argues that “Sophocles re-focuses the scene where wife meets concubine so that it becomes entirely centred not on questions of power and control but on questions of marriage, family, and love.” See also Rutherford (2012) 307-309.

that Sophocles is interested in dramatizing a different way in which war trauma in the home can impede the return and reunion of soldier and wife.

Deianeira's mistake of sending a poisoned robe to her husband as a love charm has been ascribed by most scholars to various innate flaws in her character: her naiveté, her timorousness, or her inability to learn from her past.²⁴⁶ Such interpretations locate the reasons for Deianeira's actions in the symptoms rather than in the root cause. In the *Trachiniae*, Sophocles shows how past incidents of trauma in Deianeira's life – her fear of rape by the river-god Achelous and her sexual assault by the centaur Nessus – continue to affect her as she works to heal the rift between her and her veteran husband, Heracles. Yet Deianeira's isolation in Trachis, without a supportive community, exacerbates her feelings of fear and helplessness and makes her more vulnerable to panic.

In the double messenger scene, Sophocles describes in detail Deianeira's unusual sympathy for her husband's concubine, Iole. Lichas' false message allows Deianeira to notice the similarities between herself and this new woman even before she knows Iole's true identity,

²⁴⁶ For her naiveté, see, for example, Konstan (2006) 60 and Mattison (2015) 17 n. 16; for her timorousness, Kirkwood (1958) 110-111; and for her inability to learn from her past, see Kraus (1991) 81 and Pozzi (1999) 30. Many critics have viewed Deianeira as “temperamentally disposed to paralysed inaction through fear and anxiety” (Lawrence 1978, 290). This view of Deianeira, which locates her mistake in an essentially feminine temperamental flaw, can be traced to Schiller's proto-Romantic fantasy of Deianeira's “Tiefe des weiblichen Wesens” (“depth of essential femininity”). See Segal's (1995) 27 discussion of Schiller's remark and the obstacles it raises for interpretation of the play. Jebb (2004, orig. 1892) xxxi-xxxiii interprets Deianeira as “a perfect type of gentle womanhood,” who acts out of the “necessity of woman's nature.” Whitman (1951) 112 discusses Deianeira's “heroic submissiveness” and waxes eloquent about her gentleness. Kirkwood (1958) 110-111, 115-116 identifies “innate timidity,” “impracticality” and “timorousness” as primary characteristics of Deianeira. Such estimations, even when they are intended as praise, trace Deianeira's actions to characteristics that these critics view as essentially feminine. Winnington-Ingram (1980) 74, in the same breath as he praises Deianeira as “that most appealing of Sophoclean women,” remarks that she is “ill equipped (it might seem) for the role of tragic heroine, so lacking the strength of an Antigone or an Electra.” I argue instead that Deianeira's mistake follows from the circumstances of her life as a victim of sexual violence who lacks a supportive community, not from an innate characteristic or flaw resulting from her “essentially feminine” character.

and both Lichas and the Chorus reinforce these similarities by referring to both women with similar language. This important episode highlights the cruel irony of Deianeira's situation: the only woman who shares enough of Deianeira's experiences to understand her presents a direct threat to her relationship with Heracles. The discovery of the false message also plays to Deianeira's deepest insecurities and directly provokes her panic.

Deianeira's sympathy for Iole prevents her from blaming the concubine, while her desire to be a good wife stops her from blaming Heracles. Deianeira instead seeks a cure suggested during a traumatic episode from her past. Her inability to recognize the centaur's "remedy" as a poison reflects not her naiveté, but her denial of the trauma of her sexual assault. When the truth is revealed, Deianeira's shame is intensified by her son's harsh criticism, which drives her to commit suicide. Only after Deianeira's death does her son recognize the experiences of trauma that led her to harm her husband despite her good intentions.

Sophocles' *Trachiniae* presents a wife more like Agamemnon's concubine, Cassandra, than like Clytemnestra; she is a victim of violence and sexual assault, who is tragically isolated from a supportive family and community. While I do not wish to make the claim that Deianeira would not have made her panicked mistake if there had been a supportive community present, I do think that, as in other Sophoclean plays, Deianeira's isolation is one factor that contributes to her panic and her tragic end.²⁴⁷ In this chapter I argue that Deianeira's past experiences of trauma

²⁴⁷ The isolation of the Sophoclean hero has long been recognized, but the playwright's view toward his main character's isolation – whether condemnatory or not – has been the subject of intense debate. Whitman (1951) developed Reinhardt's (1979, orig. 1933) emphasis on the isolation of the Sophoclean hero, insisting that the Sophoclean hero is admirable in his (or her) isolation. In response, others have pointed to the isolated hero's disastrous resistance to the gods. The two sides are characterized by Winnington-Ingram (1980), who takes a middle ground, as hero worshippers (Whitman and Reinhardt) and pietists. For the "pietist" point of view, see Knox (1964), though he does not see a central hero in the *Trachiniae*, and Lefèvre (2001). For a more recent argument from the "hero worshipper" side, see Lurje (2004).

continue to influence her reactions to events in the present, and that her mistake of fashioning an erotic “cure” from the wreckage of her sexual trauma demonstrates both the power of trauma to return and silence the victim, and the importance of community, which can offer the victim either shelter or exposure in her most vulnerable moments.

Making sense of the past, predicting the future

Deianeira’s opening monologue introduces two seemingly antithetical topics: her certain knowledge of the events of her “sorrowful” life, on the one hand, and her fearful uncertainty about particular events in her life, on the other. In her analysis of Deianeira’s opening monologue, Kraus (1991, 81) writes, “The very rhetoric of her first speech with its alternation of security and worry subverts her attempt to confirm the present either through similarity or by contrast with the past. Deianeira begins this final day of her life by demonstrating an unhappy tendency not to learn from experience.” I argue that Deianeira’s alternation between security and worry, certainty and uncertainty, instead presents a compelling psychological portrait of a woman attempting to create a coherent narrative from the violent events of her past. Her assertions of knowledge allow her to establish some secure ground from which to narrate events that have repeatedly made her feel insecure. If her assertions of knowledge seem stated in terms that are too absolute,²⁴⁸ it is because they respond to the powerful feelings of uncertainty and helplessness with which she is grappling.

Deianeira introduces the story of her married life with a pessimistic assertion of her unique ability to know her life’s end:

Λόγος μὲν ἔστ’ ἀρχαῖος ἀνθρώπων φανεῖς

²⁴⁸ Kraus (1991) 79 argues that Deianeira should have learned from her experiences that no knowledge is absolute. Kamerbeek (1959) *ad* 1 also notes the irony in her assertion of knowledge, “in saying that [she does know] she is shown to be ignorant of what this tragic day has in store for her.”

ὥς οὐκ ἂν αἰῶν' ἐκμάθοις βροτῶν, πρὶν ἂν
θάνη τις, οὔτ' εἰ χρηστὸς οὔτ' εἴ τῳ κακός·
ἐγὼ δὲ τὸν ἐμόν, καὶ πρὶν εἰς Ἅιδου μολεῖν,
ἔξιιδ' ἔχουσα δυστυχή τε καὶ βαρύν. (1-5)

There is a saying that appeared long ago among men
that you cannot know thoroughly the life of a mortal before
he dies, whether one's life is good or bad.
But I know well, even before I go to Hades,
that the life I have is unfortunate and grievous.

In its assertion of knowledge, Deianeira's pessimistic opening statement contrasts with the uncertainty that she exhibits in her narration of past events and of her present situation in the rest of her opening monologue (36-48). Her pre-emptive evaluation of her own life as unfortunate allows her to exercise some control over her life at a moment when she feels least in control; she does not know what will happen with her husband, but at least she knows for certain that her own life has been miserable.²⁴⁹

Deianeira employs a similarly pessimistic interpretation of her life when she introduces the topic of Heracles' current absence (σχεδὸν δ' ἐπίσταμαί τι πῆμ' ἔχοντά νιν, "I am almost certain that he is suffering some pain," 43) and later the prophecy itself (πάθη μὲν οὖν δὴ πόλλ' ἔγωγ' ἐκλαυσάμην· / ἐν δ', οἶον οὔπω πρόσθεν, αὐτίκ' ἐξερῶ, "I myself, then, have wept over many misfortunes indeed. But about one, such as never before, I will now tell you," 153-154). As with the account of her own life in lines 1-5, Deianeira makes pessimistic judgments about Heracles' current situation and the outcome of the prophecy based upon previous negative experiences. This premature evaluation demonstrates both how deeply she has been affected by

²⁴⁹ The word order, which places the emphatic personal pronoun "I" (ἐγώ, 4) and "I know well" (ἔξιιδα, 5) at the beginning of successive lines, emphasizes her personal knowledge in contrast to the saying.

the traumatic events of her past and how strongly she desires to know for certain the events that form the narrative of her life, even if they are negative.

The event that first comes to mind to exemplify her grievous life depicts a moment when Deianeira felt particularly helpless and afraid.²⁵⁰ Though it happened long ago, she narrates Achelous' unwanted courtship, which she terms a "very painful suffering in the matter of my marriage" (νυμφείων ὄτλον / ἄλγιστον 7-8), and the contest between Achelous and Heracles to win her hand in marriage (18-25). When she introduces her terrifying suitor, she depicts herself as the passive object of his request of her father for marriage: ὅς μ' ἐν τρισὶν μορφαῖσιν ἐξήτει πατρός ("he who, in three shapes, was demanding me from my father," 10).²⁵¹ Her fear arises from her helplessness in the matter of choosing her future husband.²⁵² Like the Danaids in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* 788-791, Deianeira prays for death before she can be unwillingly brought near his bed (15-17). Though she does not compare this unwanted marriage to rape as directly as the Danaids do, who call their marriage a forceful "tearer" or "render" (δαίκτορος βία...γάμου, 798-799),²⁵³ her prayers for death instead of marriage indicate that she feels, similarly to the Danaids, that her marriage to this horrible suitor would be tantamount to violent rape.

²⁵⁰ Herman (1992) 41, describing Janet's contribution to the field of psychological trauma, writes, "Helplessness constitutes the essential insult of trauma, and restitution requires the restoration of a sense of efficacy and power."

²⁵¹ The word order of this sentence depicts her fears about her transfer from father to suitor by placing the personal pronoun με between Achelous (ὅς) and his three shapes (ἐν τρισὶν μορφαῖσιν), and as far as the line allows from her father (πατρός).

²⁵² *Contra* Hamstead (2012) 206, who argues that Deianeira's only claim against Achelous "is that he came to call" and that she is "actually fortunate" that he does not rape her.

²⁵³ See Loraux's (1987) 11 discussion of this word's implications of rape and deflowering, and the Danaids' response. See also Zeitlin (1996c) 123-171 for a discussion of the Danaids' challenge to the institution of marriage.

Heracles' arrival rescues her from this unwanted marriage to Achelous. She describes the outcome of the contest between Heracles and Achelous before she narrates the contest itself:

χρόνω δ' ἐν ὑστέρω μὲν, ἀσμένῃ δέ μοι,
ὁ κλεινὸς ἦλθε Ζηνὸς Ἀλκμήνης τε παῖς·
ὃς εἰς ἀγῶνα τῷδε συμπεσὼν μάχης
ἐκλύεταιί με. (18-21)

At a later time, to my joy, he came to me,
the famous son of Zeus and Alcmena,
who joined in combat with this river-god
and released me.

Although she highlights the positive outcome of the contest, her unhappy description of married life that follows (27-35) contradicts her optimistic belief, focalized in this passage through her past self, that Heracles' victory really "released" (ἐκλύεται, 21) her from troubles. Through this quick reversal, Deianeira indicates that optimistic interpretations are less accurate than pessimistic ones. Indeed, she revises her positive evaluation of the contest in light of her present knowledge by appending a foreboding coda: τέλος δ' ἔθηκε Ζεὺς ἀγώνιος καλῶς, / εἰ δὴ καλῶς ("Zeus of Contests made the contest end well, if indeed it did end well," 26-27).²⁵⁴

The contest itself, which she feared might end in forced marriage to a creature she found repulsive, proved so traumatic for Deianeira that her feelings of helplessness and fear still affect her as she attempts to tell her story years later:

καὶ τρόπον μὲν ἂν πόνων
οὐκ ἂν διείπομι· οὐ γὰρ οἶδ'· ἀλλ' ὅστις ἦν
θακῶν ἀταρβῆς τῆς θέας, ὃδ' ἂν λέγοι.
ἐγὼ γὰρ ἤμην ἐκπεπληγμένη φόβῳ
μή μοι τὸ κάλλος ἄλγος ἐξεύροι ποτέ. (21-25)

As for the manner of their struggles,
I could not describe them, for I do not know them. Whoever was
sitting unafraid of the sight could tell this story instead.

²⁵⁴ See Goldhill (2012) 17 on the ironic use of *lisis* and *telos* in this passage.

For I was sitting struck senseless from fear
that my beauty would win me pain at some point.

Deianeira's inability to describe the contest (οὐ γὰρ οἶδα, 22) contrasts with her initial assertion of knowledge about her life (ἔξοιδα, 5). Yet *aporia* in the stories of victims and even witnesses of violence is common. Herman (1992, 1) writes, "People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner." This *aporia* in Deianeira's presentation of events highlights the moment of Deianeira's greatest fear, a moment that she is still unable to narrate because it was too awful to face.²⁵⁵ Viewed in its narrative context, the indefinite particle ποτέ ("at some point," 25) indicates Deianeira's past fear for the immediate future, the outcome of the contest. Yet her inability to relate the details of the event itself, despite her present knowledge of the outcome, demonstrates that ποτέ continues to apply to the present; Deianeira's past experience of fear continues to affect her even as she tells her story many years after the event.

Deianeira's greatest fear (μάλιστα ταρβήσασ' ἔχω, 37) centers on her husband's current absence, since no one knows where he is (κείνος δ' ὅπου / βέβηκεν οὐδεις οἶδε, 40-41) and Heracles received an oracle from Dodona predicting, as she says, "some terrible calamity" (τι δεινὸν πῆμα, 46) after an absence of fifteen months. As the audience learns from her later speech to the Chorus (141-177), however, the oracle in fact predicts either Heracles' death or his survival and a future life free from pain (ἀλυσπήτω βίω, 168).²⁵⁶ Deianeira's pessimistic

²⁵⁵ Later the Chorus, taking the role of the spectator, fills in this gap in her story (497-530). The story of the contest is not unknowable except to Deianeira, who cannot put the blank spots in her story into words. Kamerbeek (1959) *ad* 21-23 notes the formal reasons for Deianeira's *aporia*, but not the psychological reasons: "Dramatic economy and an unflinching sense of occasion have led the poet to save the picture of the combat for the choral song, which has a function comparable to the modern 'flash back.'"

²⁵⁶ On the oracles in this play and their apparent inconsistencies, see Machin (1981) 151-162 and Segal (2000).

interpretation of the oracle corresponds to her pessimistic interpretation of her life in the opening lines of her monologue (1-5). Much like Penelope in the *Odyssey*, she copes with her lack of knowledge about her husband's whereabouts or even survival by positing a negative outcome.

Indeed, as Robert Fowler (1999, 161-165) has noted, Deianeira's account of Heracles' parting instructions recalls Odysseus' parting instructions at *Od.* 18.259-270:²⁵⁷

ὄδον γὰρ ἦμος τὴν τελευταίαν ἄναξ
ὠρμάτ' ἀπ' οἴκων Ἡρακλῆς, τότε ἐν δόμοις
λείπει παλαιὰν δέλτον ἐγγεγραμμένην
ξυνθήμαθ', ἀμοὶ πρόσθεν οὐκ ἔτλη ποτέ,
πολλοὺς ἀγῶνας ἐξιῶν, οὕτω φράσαι,
ἀλλ' ὥς τι δράσων εἶρε κοῦ θανούμενος.
νῦν δ' ὥς ἔτ' οὐκ ὦν εἶπε μὲν λέχους ὅ τι
χρεῖή μ' ἐλέσθαι κτήσιν, εἶπε δ' ἦν τέκνοις
μοῖραν πατρῶας γῆς διαίρετον νέμοι. (155-163)

For when lord Heracles set out from home
on his last expedition, then he left in the house
an ancient tablet with instructions written on it,
which he had never bothered to declare to me before,
though he had gone out to face many contests,
but he went as if he were going to do some deed and not die.
But now, as though he was no more, he said what of my dowry
it was necessary for me to take, and he said what divided portion
of his ancestral land he was allotting to his children.

Like Odysseus at *Od.* 18.259-270, Heracles acknowledges the possibility of his own death abroad and gives his wife instructions to care for his property. He also writes his instructions down and notes in detail what should happen to his property after his death. In this respect, Heracles' instructions, which provide for his wife's dowry and his sons' inheritance, are more similar to contemporary Athenian wills that a soldier would leave behind before departing for a

²⁵⁷ See my discussion of *Od.* 18.259-270 in Chapter 2.

military campaign.²⁵⁸ By “updating” the *Odyssey* with a fifth-century version of the soldier’s parting testament, the playwright appeals to the contemporary experience of women who likely received similar instructions. Moreover, since Deianeira, unlike Penelope, knows the end of the “deployment” period (fifteen months), she gives voice to the peculiar combination of anticipation and dread that a waiting wife feels as the end of her husband’s deployment approaches: she wakes suddenly from sleep, “afraid that I am fated to remain deprived of the best man of all” (ταρβούσαν, εἴ με χρῆ μένειν / πάντων ἀρίστου φωτὸς ἔστερημένην, 176-177).²⁵⁹

Deianeira’s feelings of helplessness and fear, which both result from and perpetuate uncertainty about the events in her life, form the thematic thread that runs through the carefully arranged story of her courtship by and marriage to Heracles. Though seemingly contradictory, the presentation of her story of uncertainty as evidence of her certain knowledge that her life is unfortunate indicates her desire to know and make sense of the very events that have made her feel helpless and uncertain.²⁶⁰ Later, in an appeal to Heracles’ herald Lichas to tell her the truth, Deianeira exclaims, “Why is knowing a terrible thing?” (τὸ δ’ εἰδέναι τί δεινόν; 459). This

²⁵⁸ See OKell (2011) 222-224 on the similarities between this “will” and those composed by citizen-soldiers going on campaign. Thompson (1981) 16-17 includes this passage from the *Trachiniae* when discussing the provision of remarriage and dowry for widows in Athenian wills.

²⁵⁹ Marian Faye Novak (1991) 255 writes of her simultaneous anticipation and dread at the end of her husband’s deployment to Vietnam: “As I planned for a life with Dave after the war, I crossed my fingers, I knocked on wood, I prayed. And I allowed myself one last, morbid act before I lost myself in a rush of preparation for Dave’s homecoming. I planned his funeral.”

²⁶⁰ Compare David Finkel’s (2013) 168 description of Kristy Robinson, wife of Jessie, an Iraq War veteran, both of whom suffer from PTSD, as she attempts to understand the traumatic events in her life and in her relationship with Jessie: “Lately, she has been taking all of Jessie’s e-mails and text messages and assembling them as a chronology. She worries that her memory is distorting things. If she can think about what happened as an unfolding timeline, and be taken again and again to her moments of trauma as they were unfolding, maybe it will help her make sense of it all.”

central theme in the play – the importance, and difficulty, of knowing the whole story – underlies Deianeira’s attempts to navigate her traumatic past and understand how it relates to her present fear of an unfortunate end to her husband’s fifteen-month absence. Clinging to pessimism as a way of understanding the past and predicting the future, Deianeira views an unfortunate end as the logical conclusion of her negative experiences of marriage. This pessimistic prediction puts into words her worst fears, and, ironically, even precipitates them – her prediction becomes a form of self-fulfilling prophecy.

The lonely wife

One of the problems that Deianeira encounters as she confronts her fears is the absence of a supportive community that can listen and respond to her anxieties.²⁶¹ None of her relationships with friends, husband, or family provides support or relief from her fears: the Chorus, though sympathetic, is too young, her husband, the primary cause of her anxiety, is absent, and her son does not understand her. Deianeira’s lonely monologue at the beginning of the play²⁶² and her subsequent interactions with her son and the Chorus illustrate her isolation in Trachis.

Heracles’ frequent absences from home make him a constant source of anxiety for Deianeira, rather than a source of relief. She describes the anxious toil that is involved in her marriage to Heracles in her monologue:

²⁶¹ On the importance of a supportive community for victims of trauma, see Herman (1992) 9: “To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance. For the individual victim, this social context is created by relationships with friends, lovers, and family. For the larger society, the social context is created by political movements that give voice to the disempowered.”

²⁶² Commentators have often noted that no other extant play of Sophocles begins with a monologue delivered by a single character without an internal audience. See, for example, Kamerbeek (1959) 31, Easterling (1982) 71, and Davies (1991) 55. Easterling (1982) 71 comments: “Although it becomes clear at 49 that the Nurse is on stage and has been listening to her words, D. shows no awareness of the Nurse’s presence until she hears her speak.” Heiden (1989) 21 argues that Deianeira is her own audience. With this unusual opening, both Deianeira’s desire to tell her story and her isolation are emphasized.

λέχος γὰρ Ἡρακλεῖ κριτὸν
ξυστάσ' αἰεί τιν' ἐκ φόβου φόβον τρέφω,
κείνου προκηραίνουσα. νύξ γὰρ εἰσάγει
καὶ νύξ ἀπωθεῖ διαδεδεγμένη πόνον. (27-30)

For ever since I was united with Heracles
as his chosen bride, I have nourished fear upon fear
in my anxiety for him. For one night brings in toil
and the next night, in turn, thrusts it away.

The phrase αἰεί τιν' ἐκ φόβου φόβον τρέφω (28) describes the constant intrusion of fear upon Deianeira's life as a waiting wife.²⁶³ Her fears keep her awake at night, a complaint typical of waiting wives, who associate night with the time they previously spent with their husbands.²⁶⁴ As Deianeira tells it, cyclical anxieties define her married life as much as Heracles' labors define his; the choice of "toil" (πόνον, 30) to describe her worry shows how closely she links her own mental suffering with Heracles' toils abroad.²⁶⁵

Deianeira's mental toil of worry has a very real physical counterpart: the toil of childbirth.²⁶⁶ She complains that Heracles always leaves her to raise their children alone:

²⁶³ Constant fear and worry is a common experience of waiting wives. Compare Emily Hays' description of how the war and her husband's absence changed her daily activities: "Oh, completely. I mean, you worried constantly. You grieved constantly. You – because you couldn't be with them." From the transcript of an interview with Emily Hays, wife of a WWII marine pilot, conducted by her son, Wellon Lee, on March 22, 2002.

²⁶⁴ Night betrays the absence of the husband most tangibly and therefore intensifies the wife's worry. Cf. Penelope's complaints about wakeful nights at *Od.* 19.535-553, 20.88-90; and Clytemnestra's deceitful depiction of a waiting wife's complaint at Aesch. *Ag.* 889-894.

²⁶⁵ While Heracles' labors are called ἄθλοι in archaic poetry (Homer, Hesiod, Pindar), Sophocles and Euripides frequently call them πόννοι. Cf. Soph. *Trach.* 70, 170, 825; Soph. *Phil.* 1419; Eur. *Her.* 22, 357, 388, 427; Eur. *Alc.* 481, 487. A scholiast notes the similarity between Heracles' and Deianeira's toils by repeatedly calling Deianeira's mental anguish ἀγωνία (meaning both "contest" and "agony," *ad* 26, 27, 29a in Xenis 2010).

²⁶⁶ Loraux (1995) 39 writes, "the *ponos* that is brought in one night and removed in another has two meanings, for Herakles' return removes her cares, bringing with it the conception and trials of childbirth." In both poetry and prose, and especially in the Hippocratic corpus, the word πόνος is used to describe the toil of childbirth. Cf. Aesch. fr. 99, Eur. *Supp.* 920, 1135-1136, Plut. *Theseus* 20.5; Hippocratic corpus:

κάφύσαμεν δὴ παῖδας, οὐς κείνός ποτε,
γῆτης ὅπως ἄρουραν ἔκτοπον λαβών,
σπείρων μόνον προσεῖδε κάξαμῶν ἀπαξ·
τοιούτος αἰὼν εἰς δόμους τε καὶ δόμων
ἀεὶ τὸν ἄνδρ' ἔπεμπε λατρεύοντά τω. (31-35)

And we, indeed, produced children, whom he,
at some time or other, like a farmer who has acquired a distant field,
sees only once when he sows and once when he reaps.
Such a life was constantly sending my husband home
and away from home, in service to a certain man.

By imagining herself as a distant field (ἄρουραν ἔκτοπον, 32), which Heracles visits only to sow and reap, Deianeira expresses her anxiety about Heracles' perception of home.²⁶⁷ She worries that what she considers home, her household with their children, is not her husband's idea of home, but is located on the periphery of his wanderings and of his thoughts, foreign and strange because of the infrequency of his visits. The spatial image of the distant field exemplifies Deianeira's feelings of isolation and neglect because of her husband's absence.

Deianeira is not only isolated from Heracles, but also from friends and family because of their recent relocation to Trachis, a region in northern Greece near Mount Oeta.²⁶⁸

On the Nature of the Child 30, 11, *On the Diseases of Women* 1.1, 36, 42, 46, 72. For further discussion of these passages, see Loraux (1995) 29.

²⁶⁷ The comparison of the female body to a field that is ploughed and sowed is a ubiquitous metaphor for fertility in Greek literature. See the discussion in duBois (1988) 39-85. Deianeira manipulates the traditional metaphor to emphasize her isolation rather than her fertility. See also Wohl (1998) 32. Segal (1999) 45 takes Deianeira's metaphor as factual statement of her proximity to the wild: "she is a field that stands at the edge of the cultivated and domesticated land, at the point of contact with the wild." I agree with Ormand (1999) 174, n. 25 that "Deianeira believes that she should be central, and resents that Heracles treats her as marginal."

²⁶⁸ Later in the play, Heracles also experiences the isolation of residing in Trachis when he requests to see his children and mother because he is dying. His son, Hyllus, informs him that Heracles' mother, Alcmene, went back to Tiryns and that many of his children are absent as well: ἀλλ' οὔτε μήτηρ ἐνθάδ', ἀλλ' ἐπακτία / Τίρυνθι συμβέβηκεν ὥστ' ἔχειν ἔδραν, / παίδων τε τοὺς μὲν ξυλλαβοῦσ' αὐτὴ τρέφει / τοὺς δ' ἂν τὸ Θήβης ἄστρῳ ναίοντας μάθοις ("But your mother is not here. It has happened that she has a place in Tiryns on the sea, and she herself raises some of your children, whom she took with her, while others, if you were to ask, are dwelling in the city of Thebes," 1151-1154). On Alcmene's absence in the play, see Davidson (2001). Heracles' family is scattered, and besides Hyllus, no one is

ἔξ οὐ γὰρ ἔκτα κείνος Ἴφίτου βίαν,
ἡμεῖς μὲν ἐν Τραχίνι τῆδ' ἀνάστατοι
ξένῳ παρ' ἀνδρὶ ναίομεν, κείνος δ' ὅπου
βέβηκεν οὐδείς οἶδε· πλὴν ἐμοὶ πικρὰς
ὠδῖνας αὐτοῦ προσβαλὼν ἀποίχεται. (38-42)

For since he killed mighty Iphitus,
we have been dwelling in Trachis here as exiles
at the house of a guest-friend, but no one knows
where he has gone, except that, when he left,
he struck me with bitter birth-pains for him.

Deianeira's complete isolation in Trachis causes her to experience added (προσβαλὼν, 42) anxiety when Heracles leaves this time. The choice of bitter birth-pains (πικρὰς ὠδῖνας, 41-42) to describe her feelings for Heracles calls upon her experience as a mother in labor (see above, on lines 31-33), who experiences terrible pain in advance of a child's highly anticipated arrival. Though forms derived from ὠδίζ and ὠδίνειν are sometimes used in Sophocles' plays to denote mental anguish unconnected to birth (cf. *Aj.* 794), in the context of Deianeira's complaints about childrearing, the word's link with childbirth becomes especially relevant.²⁶⁹ ὠδῖνας perfectly captures the pangs of anxious expectation that Deianeira feels while waiting for her husband's return, which, she hopes, like a successful birth, will bring relief rather than more pain.²⁷⁰

The only member of Deianeira's immediate family who is present in Trachis is her son, Hyllus. The scene that follows Deianeira's opening monologue shows that Hyllus is not yet able

present to attend to him as he dies. The same isolation that afflicted Deianeira's daily existence in Trachis confronts Heracles, who is apparently unaware of his family's whereabouts upon his return.

²⁶⁹ Wender (1974) 5 points out that ὠδῖνας are usually labor pains, but see Easterling (1982, *ad* 42) for other examples of the word's use in tragedy. Though Easterling does not push the connection with labor here, I think the connection with childbirth has special relevance in the *Trachiniae*, which explores the experience of trauma from a woman's perspective. See also Ormand (1999) 44-45.

²⁷⁰ Later in the play, Heracles describes his own pain as "birth-pains," connecting the experiences of husband and wife further despite their estrangement: κείμαι πεπονημένος ἀλλήγκτοις / ὀδύνας; (985-986). On the portrayal of Heracles as a woman in labor, see Cawthorn (2008) 88.

to understand Deianeira's anxieties because his perspective differs so much from his mother's. In response to Deianeira's worries about Heracles' return, Hyllus remarks:

πρὶν δ'²⁷¹ ὁ ξυνήθης πότμος οὐκ εἶα πατρὸς
ἡμᾶς προταρβεῖν οὐδὲ δειμαίνειν ἄγαν.
νῦν δ' ὡς ξυνίημι, οὐδὲν ἐλλείψω τὸ μὴ
πάσαν πυθέσθαι τῶνδ' ἀλήθειαν πέρι. (88-91)

Previously, the customary destiny of my father
did not allow us to fear for him in advance or to be excessively worried.
But now that I understand, I will leave nothing untried
in finding out the whole truth concerning these things.

Hyllus is so accustomed to Heracles' absences and successful returns that he feels no anxiety for him while he is gone. His attitude corroborates Deianeira's earlier statement that Heracles had rarely been present to help with childrearing (31-33). The business-as-usual perspective of the child throws into relief Deianeira's constant anxiety, so vividly described in the prologue (27-30), but also shows how ill-equipped Hyllus is to understand Deianeira's fears. Hyllus' coming of age, which occurs over the course of the play,²⁷² involves coming to understand the perspectives of both his mother and his father, even when the two seem irreconcilable. Because of his ability to see both sides, he will become the mediator between his mother and his father by the end of the play. His first appearance, however, demonstrates that he does not yet know enough to understand "the whole truth" (πάσαν... ἀλήθειαν, 91) of either perspective, the waiting wife's or the returning veteran's.²⁷³

²⁷¹ I adopt, following Easterling (1982) *ad* 88, Wakefield's emendation of πρὶν in place of νῦν, the reading of the MSS, in line 88, on the grounds that an initial νῦν δέ meaning "as it was," makes a confusing contrast with the νῦν δέ that follows in line 90, meaning "as it is." For further justification, see Stinton (1976) 125. Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990) print ἀλλά in place of νῦν δέ in line 88.

²⁷² On Hyllus' coming of age, see Pozzi (1999) and Carawan (2000) 220-226. See also Garner (1990) 106-107, who compares Hyllus with both Telemachus in the *Odyssey* and Orestes in the *Oresteia*.

²⁷³ Telemachus' lack of understanding of his mother's and father's need to connect emotionally in Book 23.96-103 is similar. As Garner (1990) 101 notes, this scene with Hyllus also recalls the opening of

The *parodos*, which follows Deianeira's exchange with Hyllus, introduces the Chorus of young Trachinian maidens as a potentially sympathetic audience for Deianeira.²⁷⁴ Though the Chorus consistently expresses their sympathy for Deianeira, and Deianeira refers to them as her φίλοι throughout the play (cf. 176, 225, 298, 531, 553, 578), these "friends" do not have the experience to provide Deianeira with an understanding community.²⁷⁵ The Chorus' first appearance in the *parodos*, and Deianeira's response to them, establishes a pattern of compassionate, but incomplete understanding, which Deianeira correctly ascribes to their inexperience as unmarried women.

The *parodos* opens with a hymn to Helios,²⁷⁶ in which the Chorus requests information about Heracles' whereabouts from the god who sees everything, thereby demonstrating their awareness of Deianeira's anxieties. In the antistrophe, the Chorus sums up Deianeira's current situation with reference to her past, just as Deianeira did in the prologue:

ποθουμένα γὰρ φρενὶ πυνθάνομαι
τὰν ἀμφινεικῆ Δηιάνειραν αἰεί,
οἷά τιν' ἄθλιον ὄρνιν,
οὔ ποτ' εὐνάζειν ἀδάκρυ-
τον βλεφάρων πόθον, ἀλλ'
εὐμναστον ἀνδρὸς δαίμα τρέφουσαν ὁδοῦ
ἐνθυμίαις εὐναῖς ἀναν-
δρώτοισι τρύχεσθαι, κακὰν
δύστανον ἐλπίζουσαν αἴσαν. (103-111)

For I am finding out that, with a constantly yearning mind,
Deianeira, who was fought over on both sides,
like some miserable bird,

Odyssey Book 1, in which Telemachus is encouraged by Athena-Mentes to seek news of his father (1.178-305).

²⁷⁴ Pace Gardiner (1987) 123, who perceives "an absence of intimacy between Deianeira and the chorus."

²⁷⁵ For the identification of the Chorus as young, unmarried noble women of Trachis, see Gardiner (1987) 121-122, and Foley's Appendix B (2003) 26.

²⁷⁶ Burton (1980) 44-45 notes that the beginning of the *parodos* is in the form of a *hymnos kletikos*.

never lays to sleep the longing of her eyes
so that they do not weep,
but, nourishing a fear mindful of her husband's journey,
she wastes away on her anxious, husbandless bed,
poor woman, expecting an evil fate.

The Chorus' awareness of Deianeira's traumatic past is embedded in the epithet ἀμφινεικῆ (104), "fought over on both sides," which connects Deianeira's present suffering with her past suffering as a war prize.²⁷⁷ Moreover, the comparison to a miserable bird who constantly laments portrays Deianeira's vulnerability and persistent anxiety in terms that inspire *pathos*.²⁷⁸ The description of her fear (δειμα, 108), anxiety (ἐνθυμίους, 109), and loneliness (ἀνανδρότοισι, 109-110), and even details of phrasing (δειμα τρέφουσαν, 108; cf. ἐκ φόβου φόβον τρέφω, 28) correspond to Deianeira's presentation of her own state of mind in the prologue. By repeating elements of Deianeira's description with pathetic images (the miserable bird) and expressions of pity ("wretched woman," δύστανον, 111), the Chorus performs their strong feelings of sympathy for Deianeira.

The final strophe and antistrophe, which are addressed to Deianeira, develop the Chorus' argument of consolation. They, like Hyllus, claim that Heracles encounters many troubles in life, but always escapes with the help of some god: ἀλλά τις θεῶν / αἰὲν ἀναμπλάκητον Ἄι- / δα σφε δόμων ἐρύκει ("But one of the gods always keeps him, unfailing, away from the house of

²⁷⁷ The epithet is also used by the Chorus in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* to describe Helen (cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 686). This is the only other time the epithet appears in extant Greek poetry. The Chorus often illuminates a situation onstage through comparison with other mythological stories. Here, the possible allusion to Helen in the *Agamemnon* illuminates Deianeira's fidelity in contrast to Helen's and Clytemnestra's infidelity. Unlike Helen and Clytemnestra, but like Penelope, Deianeira constantly (ἀεί, 104) remembers and weeps for her absent husband.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Penelope's comparison of herself to the constantly lamenting nightingale at *Od.* 19.518-529, a simile that describes her anxieties about making a wrong decision in the absence of her husband, and that is aimed at stirring beggar-Odysseus' sympathy (as I argue in Chapter 2).

Hades,” 120-122). For this reason, they encourage her to have hope that Heracles will survive his current trial (122-126). This argument, which urges Deianeira to adopt an optimistic attitude similar to Hyllus’ (cf. 88-89), contradicts her pessimistic interpretation of her life and betrays the Chorus’ inexperience of married life.

In her response to this argument, Deianeira contrasts her own suffering with the Chorus’ lack of experience:

πεπυσμένη μὲν, ὡς ἀπεικάσαι, πάρει
πάθημα τοῦμόν· ὡς δ’ ἐγὼ θυμοφθορῶ
μήτ’ ἐκμάθοις παθοῦσα, νῦν δ’ ἀπειροσ εἶ. (141-143)

You come forward, I suppose, because you have found out about my suffering. May you not learn by suffering how tormented I am, as now you are inexperienced.

In her elaborate comparison between the life of a virgin (παρθένου, 148) and the life of a wife (γυνή, 148), Deianeira expands upon this contrast in order to reject the Chorus’ consolation on the grounds that their experiences are too different from hers:

τὸ γὰρ νεάζον ἐν τοιοῖσδε βόσκεται
χώροισιν αὐτοῦ, καὶ νιν οὐ θάλπος θεοῦ,
οὐδ’ ὄμβρος, οὐδὲ πνευμάτων οὐδὲν κλονεῖ,
ἀλλ’ ἡδοναῖς ἄμοχθον ἐξαίρει βίον
ἐς τοῦθ’, ἕως τις ἀντὶ παρθένου γυνή
κληθῆ, λάβῃ τ’ ἐν νυκτὶ φροντίδων μέρος,
ἥτοι πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἢ τέκνων φοβουμένη. (144-150)

For youth is nourished in such places of its own as these,
and neither the god’s heat,
nor rain, nor any winds disturb it,
but amidst pleasures it raises up a life free from toil,
until the time when one is called a woman instead of a virgin,
and takes her share of worries at night,
fearing either for her husband or for her children.

Deianeira’s description of unmarried youth as a Golden Age paradise, safe from extreme weather and free from toil, reveals her yearning for a lost feeling of protection, which the Chorus still

enjoys.²⁷⁹ Though she yearns for security, she believes, because of her traumatic experiences, that these feelings are incompatible with life as a wife and mother.²⁸⁰

Deianeira rejects the Chorus' consolation, despite their sympathy for her, because they have not yet personally experienced the anxieties of being a wife and mother. She claims instead that only someone who has experienced misfortune similar to hers could truly understand: τὸτ' ἄν τις εἰσίδοιτο, τὴν αὐτοῦ σκοπῶν / πρᾶξι, κακοῖσιν οἷς ἐγὼ βαρύνομαι ("Then one could see for oneself, by investigating one's own affairs, what misfortunes weigh me down," 151-152).²⁸¹ Her opening words in the prologue (1-5), however, imply that she believes her life has been uniquely miserable. Isolated from husband, friends, and family, with only the young and inexperienced Chorus to offer sympathy, she cannot imagine another person who could understand her fully or offer a sense of security such as she knew before she became Heracles' bride. Consequently, this interaction with the Chorus prepares for Deianeira's confrontation with the captive women and the concubine Iole not only because it establishes a precedent of sympathy between Deianeira and a group of younger women (the Chorus), but also because,

²⁷⁹ Easterling (1982) *ad* 144-77 notes that this passage recalls three passages in the *Odyssey* that describe locations that are protected and free from disturbance by excessive snow, storms, rain, or sun: 4.566 (the Elysian fields), 5.478-481 (the two bushes that Odysseus takes refuge under), and 6.43-44 (Mount Olympus). The second passage (5.478-481), in which Odysseus finds a safe space beneath two bushes, marking the beginning of his process of recovery on the island of Phaeacia, offers the best point of comparison. On Phaeacia as an "idealized halfway house," see Race (2014) 47-66. Deianeira yearns for this kind of safe space, but in her distress imagines that it exists only for unmarried women.

²⁸⁰ Seaford (1986) 52-53 demonstrates that comparison of the unmarried bride-to-be to a plant in a secluded place is a *topos* of Greek wedding poetry. Once married, the wife is no longer sheltered by her family. See Parca (1992) 177-181 on the erotic imagery in this passage. Nooter (2012b) 69-70 points out that Deianeira keeps the gender of the young person in her metaphor neuter (τὸ νεάζον, 144) until the young person reaches maturity, "thereby poignantly suggesting that the joy experienced in youth is enjoyed solely in the absence of gender. In other words, happiness and femaleness are mutually exclusive states."

²⁸¹ Nooter (2012b) 70 comments, "Just as Deianira separates herself in her first speech by addressing no one, she designates her second speech as one that cannot truly be heard by others. Each of Deianira's expansive acts of speech is also a self-isolating act."

when she meets Iole, Deianeira finally encounters a younger woman who can understand all too well what it is like to be Deianeira.²⁸²

Iole and the double messenger scene

The double messenger scene, during which the concubine Iole is introduced, allows the audience to see Deianeira's reaction to the news of Heracles' success and to the appearance of Iole before she knows Iole's true identity.²⁸³ The contrast between Deianeira's initial sympathy for Iole and her heartbroken realization that she poses a threat is made possible by Lichas' deception. Many have also noted that the deception serves a thematic purpose in the play, developing the themes of truth and appearance, knowledge and ignorance, which were introduced in Deianeira's opening monologue.²⁸⁴ I would add that the scene heightens Deianeira's fear of not knowing the truth about her husband's fate.²⁸⁵ Furthermore, by calling attention to the similarities between Deianeira's and Iole's experiences, this scene delineates the cruel irony of Deianeira's situation. Her interactions with Iole recall Deianeira's past experiences

²⁸² Easterling (1982) *ad* 141-77 makes the first point about Deianeira's attitude of sympathy toward younger women; I have contributed the second. Deianeira and Iole share their pre-marital experiences in particular; Iole's secret marriage to Heracles is only just beginning.

²⁸³ This function of the double messenger scene has long been recognized. See, for example, Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1917) 142-145, Reinhardt (1979, orig. 1933) 43-44, Beck (1953) 10-21, Gellie (1972) 61, and Halleran (1986) 239. Davies (1991) 87 argues that the double messenger scene may be explained as a "characteristic Sophoclean doublet," like the double burial of Polyneices in the *Antigone*.

²⁸⁴ On these themes, see Lawrence (1978) 288-304 and Reinhardt (1979, orig. 1933) 41-44. Di Benedetto (1983) 146 compares this double messenger scene with the double messenger scene in *OT*, and argues that the pursuit of truth is emphasized in both. See also Payne (2000), who compares the structure of these two double messenger scenes with the interaction between Neoptolemus, the false merchant, and Philoctetes at Soph. *Phil.* 220-627. Janka (2004) 187-332 (unconvincingly, in my opinion) points out similarities in the structures and plot motifs of the scenes between Phaedra and Hippolytus (Eur. *Hipp.* 121-731) and Deianeira and Iole (*Trach.* 94-820), as both feature a secret, erotic suffering, a disclosure, and a resulting "Frauen-Komplott," which ends with the suicide of the main character.

²⁸⁵ As I argue in Chapter 3, false reports are a common source of anxiety for waiting wives, who rely upon the whims of the messenger to convey news about their husband's survival. Cf. Hom. *Od.* 14.126-130, 19.185-202, Aesch. *Ag.* 863-872, Eur. *Her.* 551-552, Eur. *Hel.* 123-132. See also Hdt. 5.87.

of trauma and posit Iole as the only woman in Trachis who can fully understand Deianeira's experiences. Yet rather than provide consolation through mutual understanding, Iole poses a threat to Deianeira's marriage. Deianeira's gradual recognition of this fact, which is delayed by the doubling of the messengers, inspires her fatal panic.

Sophocles' careful characterization of the two messengers calls attention to their opposed approaches to delivering news about Heracles' return and the effect that this news has upon Deianeira. Their contradictory messages aggravate Deianeira's fears about not knowing the whole story by introducing competing versions of the story of Heracles' conquest and return. The first messenger, who merely wants to receive a reward from Deianeira by being the first to bring good news (180-181, 190-191), contrasts with Lichas, Heracles' messenger, who believes he is being kind to Deianeira by lying about Iole (481-483).²⁸⁶ Ironically, the first messenger's transparently self-serving approach better serves Deianeira's desire to know the whole story, while Lichas' approach, which attempts to take her feelings into account but misunderstands them, runs counter to her needs and even intensifies her fear.

After the first messenger announces briefly that Heracles was triumphant in his conquest of Oechalia and is returning home, the first visual evidence that Deianeira receives of Heracles' triumphant return enters the stage.²⁸⁷ She narrates her first glimpse of the train of captive women,

²⁸⁶ Altmeyer (2001) 67 argues that Lichas' justification of his lies has "ein 'modernes' Gepräge," as it stems from contemporary sophistic methods of argumentation. He compares Lichas to Odysseus in *Philoctetes*.

²⁸⁷ Seale (1982) 190 remarks, on the staging of this entrance, "Deianira is surrounded by younger women; more specifically she is physically placed between two distinct representative groups, one imbued with the joy and optimism of youth, the other, equally young, but already experienced in the extremity of grief. The circle of grief and joy just formulated in the lyrics of the Chorus is here embodied in the stage groupings, and Deianira's position, between two large formations, suggests the pressure of two opposing forces, the essential conflict of the scene."

who precede the arrival of the herald, Lichas, to the Chorus: ὄρω, φίλαι γυναῖκες, οὐδέ μ' ὄμματος / φρουρὰν παρήλθε, τόνδε μὴ λεύσσειν στόλον (“I see, dear women, nor does the sight of this procession escape my vigilant eye,” 225-226). The captive women, though evidence of Heracles’ successful conquest, arouse Deianeira’s pity, not her joy: αὐταὶ δέ, πρὸς θεῶν, τοῦ ποτ’ εἰσὶ καὶ τίνες; / οἰκτραὶ γάρ, εἰ μὴ ξυμφοραὶ κλέπτουσί με (“But these women, by the gods, to whom do they belong and who are they? For they are pitiable, unless their misfortunes deceive me,” 242-243). In response, however, Lichas presents the women as evidence of Heracles’ victory only, ignoring Deianeira’s question about their identity and her expression of pity for them. He chooses, instead, to answer Deianeira’s first question about who owns them, and attempts to hide their human suffering by presenting them as a genderless object, the “choice possession” of Heracles and the gods: ταύτας ἐκείνος Εὐρύτου πέρσας πόλιν / ἐξείλεθ’ αὐτῷ κτήμα καὶ θεοῖς κριτόν (“He chose them when he sacked Eurytus’ city as a choice possession for himself and for the gods,” 244-245).

Lichas’ long speech is full of evasions and distractions aimed at easing Deianeira’s trepidation, circumventing her potential resentment at Heracles’ infidelity, and justifying Heracles’ actions.²⁸⁸ He appeals to Heracles’ authority in his account of the outrageous story that Heracles was enslaved to a woman in Lydia by saying twice, “as he himself says” (ὡς φησ’ αὐτός, 249; ὡς αὐτὸς λέγει, 253).²⁸⁹ Furthermore, he prefaces the information that Heracles was enslaved to a woman by assuring Deianeira that she should not feel resentment because Zeus

²⁸⁸ On Lichas’ rhetorical strategies for justifying Heracles’ actions, see Machin (1981) 185-186, Easterling (1982) *ad* 248-290, and Heiden (1988).

²⁸⁹ Earlier, when Hyllus reported Heracles’ enslavement, Deianeira expressed disbelief: πάν τοίνυν, εἰ καὶ τοῦτ’ ἔτλη, κλύοι τις ἄν (“One would hear anything, then, if he had endured even that,” 71). Hyllus’ report was hearsay, however, whereas Lichas takes care to present his information as firsthand. Roselli (1982) 14, 16-17 argues that Lichas represents Heracles’ authority and anticipates his presence onstage.

was responsible: τῷ λόγῳ δ' οὐ χρῆ φθόνον, / γύναι, προσεῖναι, Ζεὺς ὅτου πράκτωρ φανῆ
 (“But resentment at the report must not be present, in a case where Zeus is obviously the doer,”
 250-251). Lichas instead attempts to steer Deianeira’s emotions toward outrage at what Heracles
 suffered at the hands of Eurytus by presenting the narrative of Heracles’ insult in a kind of ring
 composition,²⁹⁰ with the insult spotlighted at the center (262-269), and by using strongly
 condemnatory language of Eurytus and his family members. He emphasizes, first, Heracles’
 status as an old guest-friend in order to condemn Eurytus’ violation of hospitality:

ὃς αὐτὸν ἐλθόντ' ἐς δόμους ἐφέστιον,
 ξένον παλαιὸν ὄντα, πολλὰ μὲν λόγοις
 ἐπερρόθησε, πολλὰ δ' ἀτηρᾶ φρενί. (262-264)

When [Heracles] came to [Eurytus’] house at his hearth,
 although he was an old guest-friend, [Eurytus] raged against him
 greatly with words, and greatly with a baneful mind.

Later, he describes Eurytus and his sons’ treatment of Heracles as hubristic, and implies that they
 justly inhabit Hades for their arrogance and evil speech:

ὔβριν γὰρ οὐ στέργουσιν οὐδὲ δαίμονες.
 κείνοι δ' ὑπερχλίοντες ἐκ γλώσσης κακῆς
 αὐτοὶ μὲν Ἄιδου πάντες εἰς' οἰκήτορες,
 πόλις δὲ δούλη. (280-283)

For the gods also do not like violence.
 And they, in their arrogance resulting from evil speech,
 are all themselves inhabitants of Hades,
 and their city is enslaved.

²⁹⁰ The time sequence of the events narrated in Lichas’ speech, as Easterling (1982) *ad* 248-290 notes, is actually B-C-A-B-C, with A representing Eurytus’ insult to Heracles and Heracles’ murder of Iphitus (260-273), B representing Heracles’ enslavement in Lydia as punishment (248-253, 274-280), and C representing the resulting sack of Oechalia in revenge (254-260, 281-285). Lichas spends the most lines narrating the middle section (A).

After trying to turn Deianeira against Eurytus' family with this condemnatory language, Lichas reintroduces the topic of the enslaved women, presenting them as the just outcome of Eurytus' family's mistakes and their abuse of Heracles:

τάσδε δ' ἄσπερ εἰσορᾶς
ἐξ ὀλβίων ἄζηλον εὐροῦσαι βίον
χωροῦσι πρὸς σέ· ταῦτα γὰρ πόσις τε σὸς
ἔφειτ', ἐγὼ δέ, πιστὸς ὦν κείνῳ, τελεῶ. (283-286)

And these women, the very ones whom you see here,
having won an unenviable life from blessed lives,
come to you, for your husband commanded
these things, which I am carrying out in loyalty to him.

Lichas closes the speech by appealing to Heracles' authority (285-286) and by redirecting Deianeira's attention to his imminent, and happy, return (287-289), which he calls "the sweetest thing to hear" (ἥδιστον κλύειν, 290). With these closing words, Lichas attempts to shape Deianeira's response to his story. He also attempts to encourage Deianeira's feelings of loyalty to Heracles by turning her against the captive women and by presenting himself as a good example to follow.

Indeed, the impressionable and inexperienced Chorus reacts as Lichas intends, interpreting the women's presence as a "delight" to Deianeira because they are evidence of Heracles' successful revenge:²⁹¹

ἄνασσα, νῦν σοι τέρψις ἐμφανῆς κυρεῖ,
τῶν μὲν παρόντων, τὰ δὲ πεπυσμένη λόγῳ. (291-292)

Queen, now delight appears before your eyes,
some here present, the rest you have learned by report.²⁹²

²⁹¹ For delight as a response to successful revenge, cf. Clytemnestra's response to her murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra in Aesch. Ag. 1391-1397, 1443-1447.

²⁹² τῶν μὲν παρόντων, "some here present," refers to the appearance of Lichas and the captive women; the other things (τὰ δέ) refer to Heracles' imminent return. See Easterling (1982) *ad* 291-292.

Though Deianeira recognizes that propriety requires a public reaction of joy commensurate with Heracles' success (293-295), she finds unsettling the "present circumstances" (τῶν μὲν παρόντων, 292) in which she is supposed to delight, and continues to feel pity for these women, whose suffering she imagines in detail:

ἔμοι γὰρ οἴκτος δεινὸς εἰσέβη, φίλοι,
ταύτας ὀρώσῃ δυσπότημους ἐπὶ ξένης
χώρας ἀοίκους ἀπάτοράς τ' ἀλωμένας,
αἱ πρὶν μὲν ἦσαν ἐξ ἐλευθέρων ἴσως
ἀνδρῶν, τανῦν δὲ δούλον ἴσχουσιν βίον. (298-302)

For a terrible pity came upon me, friends,
when I saw these unfortunate women,
wandering homeless and fatherless in a foreign land,
who were previously, perhaps, born to free parents,
but now have the life of a slave.

In part, her pity is motivated by her pessimistic fear that someday her own children might suffer like these women are suffering (303-306).²⁹³ She is also, however, reminded of her personal misfortunes, especially when she sees Iole, who reminds her of her younger self:

ὦ δυστάλαινα, τίς ποτ' εἰ νεανίδων;
ἄνανδρος, ἢ τεκνοῦσσα; πρὸς μὲν γὰρ φύσιν
πάντων ἄπειρος τῶνδε, γενναία δέ τις.
Λίχα, τίνοσ ποτ' ἐστὶν ἡ ξένη βροτῶν;
τίς ἢ τεκοῦσα, τίς δ' ὁ φιτύσας πατήρ;
ἔξειπ'· ἐπεὶ νιν τῶνδε πλείστον ὄγκτισα
βλέπουσ', ὄσπερ καὶ φρονεῖν οἶδεν μόνη. (307-313)

O most miserable woman, who among young girls are you?
Are you husbandless, or are you a mother? Judging by your appearance,
you are inexperienced in all these things, but are some noble girl.
Lichas, to whom among mortals does the stranger belong?
Who is her mother, and who is the father who gave her life?

²⁹³ Rutherford (2012) 308 remarks that Deianeira reveals tragic knowledge, in this passage, of the fickleness of fortune, as opposed to Clytemnestra in the corresponding scene with Cassandra: "In her consciousness that fortune is fickle and success fragile, we discern a more prudent insight than Clytemnestra's, and one typical of tragic wisdom. That awareness was lacking in Clytemnestra in the equivalent scene; although preening herself on the fact that her household had long been rich, she made no reference to the possibility that it might fall on harder times."

Tell me, since I pitied her most among these women
when I saw her, inasmuch as she alone actually has understanding.

Deianeira's curiosity about this woman's identity results from her impression that, as a noble woman who has experienced great misfortune, she alone actually possesses understanding of the sorts of things that Deianeira has also experienced.²⁹⁴ Though Deianeira notices that this woman, like the Chorus, is younger than she is, and has perhaps not experienced marriage or motherhood (πάντων ἄπειρος τῶνδε, 308-309, cf. νῦν δ' ἄπειρος εἶ, 143), she is also aware that the woman has recently experienced horrible violence and has lost her parents and home. Like a new bride, she is separated from her father and mother, no longer sheltered from the "elements" of life. Throughout Deianeira's inquiry, however, Iole does not speak; instead, Deianeira narrates Iole's thoughts, imagining an identity similar to and sympathetic with her own (cf. ὄσωπερ καὶ φρονεῖν οἶδεν μόνη, 313).²⁹⁵

Later, after she discovers who Iole really is, Deianeira modifies her explanation of the cause of her "strange pity" for Iole:

²⁹⁴ The phrase ὄσωπερ καὶ φρονεῖν οἶδεν μόνη has caused some confusion among commentators and translators, who are uncertain how to interpret φρονεῖν. Jebb (2004, orig. 1892) translates, "Inasmuch as she is the only one who has the sense to feel her position," while Kamerbeek (1959) *ad* 313 cites Mazon's translation in Dain and Mazon (1965), "d'autant qu'elle est seule à se dominer." Kamerbeek interprets φρονεῖν as σωφρονεῖν, which has no parallel. Easterling (1982) *ad* 313 does not try to make sense of the line; she presents both Jebb's and Kamerbeek/Mazon's opinions and adds little. Lloyd-Jones (1994) translates, "in as much as she alone can feel and understand." Most recently, Mattison (2015) 16 translates, "she alone is self-aware." Each translator feels compelled to add something that is absent from the Greek ("the sense to feel her position," "behave," "can feel," "self-aware"), and none of them translates the καί. Jebb and Kamerbeek/Mazon rewrite φρονεῖν to mean something that φρονεῖν never means (σωφρονεῖν) because they do not understand the relationship that Deianeira is drawing between herself and Iole. Lloyd-Jones comes closer to the meaning of the Greek, but confuses the precise relationship by adding "can feel." On φρονεῖν and similar lexemes in Sophocles, see Coray (1993) 154-203; in her interpretation of this particular passage, she expands upon the definition offered by Jebb: "φρονεῖν οἶδεν das Wissen um das Schärfe der Sinne für die besondere Situation [...] Hier bezeichnet φρονεῖν jeweils die geistige Wachheit, das wache Bewusstsein bezüglich der Situation, aus dem sich dann ein bestimmtes Verhalten ergibt" (159).

²⁹⁵ Wohl (1998) 34, 38, 40 argues that Deianeira projects her own feelings by imagining Iole's.

ἐπεὶ σφ' ἐγὼ
ὄκτιρα δὴ μάλιστα προσβλέψασ', ὅτι
τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς τὸν βίον διώλεσεν,
καὶ γῆν πατρώαν οὐχ ἐκούσα δύσμορος
ἔπερσε κἀδούλωσεν. (463-467)

Since I
pitied her, indeed, most of all when I saw her,
because her beauty ruined her life,
and she, miserable one, by no fault of her own
caused her fatherland to be sacked and enslaved.

She claims that she pitied Iole “because her beauty ruined her life,” in language similar to the language she used to describe herself in the opening monologue: ἐγὼ γὰρ ἤμην ἐκπεπληγμένη φόβῳ / μή μοι τὸ κάλλος ἄλγος ἐξεύροι ποτέ (“For I was sitting struck senseless from fear that my beauty would win me pain at some point,” 24-25).²⁹⁶ Deianeira intuitively recognizes the similarity between herself and Iole, both victims of violence because of their beauty, even before she knows Iole’s story. When she does find out the details of Iole’s life, this intuitive connection is confirmed.

Deianeira’s identification with Iole is so strong that not being able to communicate with her, to find out who she is and to hear her story, ranks as another unfortunate event in Deianeira’s life: εἶπ', ὦ τάλαιν', ἀλλ' ἡμὴν ἐκ σαυτῆς· ἐπεὶ / καὶ ξυμφορὰ τοι μὴ εἰδέναι σέ γ' ἦτις εἶ (“But you tell me, o wretched one, yourself, since it is really a misfortune, you can be sure, not to know who you are,” 320-321). Each word in this sentence aims at establishing a relationship between herself and the woman:²⁹⁷ the imperative, the vocative “o wretched one,”

²⁹⁶ Segal (1977) 115 lists this and other parallels between Deianeira and Iole. See also Wohl (1998) 18 and Ormand (1999) 45-46.

²⁹⁷ Seale (1982) 193 argues that Deianeira probably walked right up to Iole at this climactic moment of her inquiry: “On this occasion the intimacy of the renewed request implies that she goes right up to Iole, symbolising on-stage the nearest point to truth and the point of highest emotion.”

which expresses sympathy, the emphatic use of personal and reflexive pronouns, “to us from you yourself” (ἡμῖν ἐκ σαυτῆς), the casually personal “you can be sure” (τοί),²⁹⁸ and her insistence that it is really a misfortune not to know who she in particular (γῆ) is.

Iole, however, is apparently in shock, so traumatized that she cannot speak.²⁹⁹ Yet even in her speechless distress, she recalls a younger Deianeira:

οὐ τάρᾳ τῷ γε πρόσθεν οὐδὲν ἐξ ἴσου
χρόνῳ διήσει γλώσσαν, ἥτις οὐδαμὰ
προὔφηεν οὔτε μείζον' οὔτ' ἐλάσσονα,
ἀλλ' αἰὲν ὠδίνουσα συμφορᾶς βάρους
δακρυροεὶ δύστηνος, ἐξ ὅτου πάτραν
διήνεμον λέλοιπεν. (322-327)

She will not speak at all, exactly like the time before,
for she has not uttered anything either great or small,
but has been weeping, the poor girl, constantly
distressed by the weight of her misfortune
since she left her wind-swept fatherland.

Lichas describes Iole’s constant distress with the verbal form of the word that Deianeira had used to describe the pain caused by Heracles’ absence: birth-pangs (ὠδίνουσα, 325; cf. ὠδίνας, 42).

Here the connection with childbirth is less relevant, but the repetition of the word serves to connect the experiences of these two women, both in pain because of the actions of Heracles.

When Deianeira realizes that the woman’s wounds are too recent to put into coherent speech, Deianeira, who described a similar experience of her own in the prologue (21-25), allows her to enter the house without pressing the issue further:

ἢ δ' οὖν ἐάσθω, καὶ πορευέσθω στέγας
οὔτως ὅπως ἤδιστα, μηδὲ πρὸς κακοῖς
τοῖς οὖσιν ἄλλην πρὸς γ' ἐμοῦ λύπην λάβοι.

²⁹⁸ According to Denniston (1978) 540-541, τοί is “persuasive.”

²⁹⁹ See Rood (2010) on Iole’s silence and its connection with other significant silences in the play, including Deianeira’s silent final exit. See also Montiglio (2000) 190-191.

ἄλις γὰρ ἡ παρούσα.

(329-332)

Leave her alone, then, and let her enter the house
as pleasantly as possible, nor would she receive from me
further grief in addition to her existing troubles.
For her present grief is enough.

Sophocles highlights Deianeira's sympathetic reaction to Iole's grief in order to emphasize the potential relationship of mutual understanding that Deianeira believes they could have. Rather than add to her grief, Deianeira hopes to make Iole's transition into her home as pleasant as possible (οὕτως ὅπως ἥδιστα, 330).

As soon as Lichas and the captive women enter the house, however, the first messenger approaches Deianeira in order to correct Lichas' deceptive version of Heracles' story. Unlike Lichas, who is more deeply involved in the family's affairs and a partisan of Heracles,³⁰⁰ the first messenger has little concern for Deianeira's feelings and perhaps wishes to ingratiate himself even more, as he reports that Heracles sacked Oechalia because he wanted to have the woman as his "secret wife" (κρύφιον ὡς ἔχοι λέχος, 360).³⁰¹ The unexpected twist in her relationship with the young woman causes Deianeira to doubt her understanding of her own situation: οἴμοι τάλαινα, ποῦ ποτ' εἰμὶ πράγματος; ("O I am wretched, what are my circumstances?" 375). Suddenly, the woman with whom she had sympathized because she too had suffered many disasters has become a disaster for Deianeira: τίν' ἐσδέδεγμαί πημονὴν ὑπόστεγον /

³⁰⁰ In trying to protect Heracles Lichas ironically causes his own death and the death of Heracles.

³⁰¹ As Korzeniewski (1975) 377 points out regarding Eur. *El.* 479-481, λέχος in Greek tragedy always refers to a legitimate wife or marriage, unless a qualifying adjective (as here) makes clear otherwise, *pace* Schmiel (1972) 277 n. 3. See Calame (1992) 30-33 and Zeitlin (1996a) 28-29 on the semantics of the word. κρύφιον indicates that Heracles intends to take Iole as a concubine. In the prologue, Deianeira describes herself as the λέχος κριτόν of Heracles (27), which is echoed by Lichas' description of the captive women as a κτήμα κριτόν (245). The messenger thus introduces Iole in terms that succinctly convey both her similarity to Deianeira and her threat to Deianeira's marriage.

λαθραῖον; ὃ δύστηνος (“What secret sorrow have I welcomed beneath my roof? O wretched me!” 376-377). Nonetheless, Deianeira still wants to know Iole’s name: ἄρ’ ἀνόνημος / πέφυκεν, ὥσπερ οὐπάγων διώμνητο, / ἢ κάρτα λαμπρὰ καὶ κατ’ ὄμμα καὶ φύσιν; (“Is she actually nameless, as the one who brought her swore, she who is especially radiant both in her looks and in her form?” 377-379). She is torn between seeing Iole as a threat – a “secret wife” (κρύφιον...λέχος, 360) to Heracles and thus a “secret sorrow” (πημονήν... λαθραῖον, 376-377) to herself – and as a woman with a story strangely similar to her own.

The first messenger’s revelation of Iole’s identity causes Deianeira to experience a familiar reaction of shock: τί χρῆ ποεῖν, γυναῖκες; ὡς ἐγὼ λόγοις / τοῖς νῦν παροῦσιν ἐκπεπληγμένη κυρῶ (“What should I do, women? I am shocked by the story now at hand,” 385-386). Deianeira had used the same word, ἐκπεπληγμένη (24), to describe her response to the violent contest between Achelous and Heracles, which she could not recount because in shock from fear. Iole’s presence, which recalls by analogy the circumstances of her own contested marriage, opens the wound once more, so that she relives her past shock, pain, and fear as she confronts Iole’s shock, pain, and fear as the “secret wife” of her husband, the man who killed Iole’s family and conquered her city.³⁰²

The choral ode that caps the double messenger scene retells Deianeira’s prologue story from the perspective of a third party in order to make even more clear the connection that Deianeira has been drawing between herself and Iole. They are both beautiful and pitiable, bereft

³⁰² See Herman (1992) 48: “While specific, trauma-related symptoms seem to fade over time, they can be revived, even years after the event, by reminders of the original trauma.” Rabinowitz (2014) 195 argues, “both women are similarly battle prizes, whether married or not. The potential rape of Deianeira and the actual rape of Iole are not so different; men in war take women, and sometimes they call this prize their wife. The family structure is contaminated by the sexual dynamics of war.”

of family and far from home, and they have both experienced violence caused by men's erotic desire. Unlike Deianeira, the Chorus actually describes the scene of violence:

τότ' ἦν χερός, ἦν δὲ τό-
ξων πάταγος,
ταυρείων τ' ἀνάμιγδα κεράτων·
ἦν δ' ἀμφίπλεκτοι κλίμακες, ἦν δὲ μετώ-
πων ὀλόεντα
πλήγματα καὶ στόνος ἀμφοῖν. (517-522)

Then there was the clash of hands and of bows,
and of bull horns mixed together;
and there was the intertwined ladder move, the destructive
blows of foreheads and the groaning of them both.

The vivid description of the mix of body parts (χερός, 517; κεράτων, 518; κλίμακες, 519; μετώπων, 519) and loud noises (πάταγος, 517; ὀλόεντα πλήγματα, 521-522; στόνος, 522) contrasts sharply with the Chorus' description of the distant, quiet, and lonely bride:

ἀ δ' εὐώπιδ' ἀβρὰ
τηλαυγεί παρ' ὄχθῳ
ἦστο τὸν ὄν προσμένουσ' ἀκοίταν.
ἐγὼ δὲ θατήρ μὲν οἶα φράζω.³⁰³
τὸ δ' ἀμφινείκητον ὄμμα νύμφας
ἐλεινὸν ἀμμένει <τέλος>·
κάπο ματρὸς ἄφαρ βέβαχ',
ὥστε πόρτις ἐρήμα. (523-530)

But the delicate fair-faced woman
sat upon the far-gleaming hill,
waiting for the husband that would be hers.
I speak as a spectator would,
but the fought-over, piteous face
of the maiden awaits the end,
and suddenly she has gone from her mother
like a deserted calf.

³⁰³ Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990) print †ἐγὼ δὲ μάτηρ μὲν οἶα φράζω†. Following Dain (1965) and Easterling (1982), I have adopted and translated Zielinski's (1896) 528-529 n. 5 emendation of μάτηρ to θατήρ. For a more recent consideration of the textual problems in this line, see Rodighiero (2003).

Deianeira's alienation and vulnerability are vividly rendered in the Chorus' comparison of her to a deserted calf separated from her mother (πόρτις ἐρήμα, 530).³⁰⁴ The captive women, as Deianeira has recognized (298-302), have most recently had a similar experience of being violently separated from family and home. The placement of this choral ode directly after Deianeira's interactions with the captive women calls attention to the similarity of their experiences. The captive woman to whom the comparison most applies is Heracles' "secret wife" (κρούφιον...λέχος, 360), Iole. The ode describes the violent circumstances of Deianeira's marriage in place of a description of the violent circumstances of Iole's, reinforcing the similarities between the two women. The ode also fills the gap in Deianeira's prologue speech, positing the Chorus as a sympathetic witness of the traumatic events of her life. Their assumption of the role of witness here (ἐγὼ δὲ θατήρ μὲν οἶα φράζω, 526) prepares for their later role as bystanders willing to testify to the experiences that led Deianeira to send the fatal love-charm.³⁰⁵

The prolonged double messenger scene puts on display an important concern of waiting wives – the difficulty of receiving reliable knowledge about their husbands' return – and introduces a further complication, Heracles' concubine. Deianeira's unusual response to Iole contrasts strikingly with Clytemnestra's response to Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*.³⁰⁶ She instead feels that Iole's position reflects her own miserable past. By dramatizing Deianeira's conflicted

³⁰⁴ For an analysis of Deianeira's detachment in this passage, see Ormand (1999) 41. Seaford (1986) 53 shows that the depiction of Deianeira as a calf bereft of its mother corresponds to a *topos* in wedding poetry and even in wedding ceremonies.

³⁰⁵ Even if the emendation θατήρ is not correct, the emphatic personal pronoun verb ἐγὼ and the verb φράζω indicate the chorus' intent to witness to experiences that Deianeira cannot relate. See Rodighiero (2012) 93 on the identity of the ἐγὼ.

³⁰⁶ Deianeira's sympathetic response to her husband's concubine is unique in Greek tragedy, which, as opposed to epic, highlights conflicts between wives and concubines. For an overview of tragedy's depictions of concubines and the relevance of these scenes to contemporary Athenian discourses on marriage, see Foley (2001) 87-105.

reaction to Iole, Sophocles shows a wife struggling with her own identity and her past experiences of trauma as embodied by another woman. Her panicked reaction results from her split consciousness of Iole both as a threat to her marriage and as a victimized woman just like herself.

Suppressing emotion

Though Deianeira has been forthcoming to the Chorus about her emotions, and even reveals her strange pity for the captive women to Lichas, she suppresses appeals to *pathos* in the speech in which she attempts to coax the truth from him, relying instead on appeals to *logos* and *ethos*. In so doing, she suppresses her feelings of anger, resentment, and fear, presenting instead the “ideal” wife’s reaction, absent of anger and resentment, a fantasy that Lichas imagined and modeled to Deianeira in his deception speech. Insofar as Deianeira’s speech consciously presents the imagined reaction of the ideal wife, her appeal to Lichas is parallel to Clytemnestra’s deceptive speech parodying the discourse of the ideal wife in the *Agamemnon* (855-913). Unlike Clytemnestra, however, Deianeira actually wishes that this voice and the actions accompanying it would fit hers, as subsequent remarks about her desire to act properly attest (cf. 552-553, 582-587, 721-722). Her desire to know the truth, which she demonstrated in her opening monologue and in her interactions with Hyllus and Iole, motivates her persuasive appeals to *ethos* and *logos*. As she demonstrates in the prologue, Deianeira believes that knowing the truth will release her from the prison of her anxious uncertainty. She pursues this goal, therefore, even though it requires muting her emotions.

Deianeira begins her speech by appealing both to her character (*ethos*) and to her reason (*logos*):

μή, πρὸς σε τοῦ κατ’ ἄκρον Οἰταίου νόπος
Διὸς καταστράπτοντος, ἐκκλέψης λόγον.

οὐ γὰρ γυναικὶ τοὺς λόγους ἐρεῖς κακῆ,
οὐδ' ἦτις οὐ κάποιδε τάνθρώπων, ὅτι
χαίρειν πέφυκεν οὐχὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἀεί. (436-440)

Don't, by Zeus who hurls lightning down
upon the high grove of Oeta, don't conceal the story.
For you will not be telling your story to a bad woman,
nor to one who does not know thoroughly that it is natural
for men not to take pleasure in the same things always.

In her appeal to Lichas not to hide the truth from her, she claims first that she is not a bad woman (an appeal to *ethos*) – she is, as it were, not Clytemnestra and will not react to Iole as Clytemnestra reacted to Cassandra – and second that she is not ignorant of the way men naturally are (an appeal to *logos* – her knowledge – and *ethos* – the character of men). Her appeal to *logos* is expanded in the argument that follows, when she uses an enthymeme to establish that it would be foolish, even mad (κάρατα μαίνομαι, 446), for her to blame her husband or Iole for being ruled by love (445-448).³⁰⁷ By introducing the god Eros as a third party responsible for Heracles' desire, Deianeira shifts the blame to the divine sphere, against which it is futile to argue, just as Lichas shifted the blame to Zeus for Heracles' enslavement to Omphale (cf. τῷ λόγῳ δ' οὐ χρεὴ φθόνον, / γύναι, προσεῖναι, Ζεὺς ὅτου πράκτωρ φανῆ, “But resentment at the report must not be present, in a case where Zeus is obviously the doer,” 250-251). Deianeira models her ethical and logical appeals after Lichas' prescriptions for Deianeira's behavior in his deception speech; she distributes blame entirely to the divine sphere, and she advances an argument that presents herself as a woman who does not feel resentment at her husband's infidelities.

³⁰⁷ The enthymeme is a rhetorical appeal to *logos* that has a major premise, minor premise, and conclusion, one part of which is not always explicitly stated. Here, the major premise is “it is foolish to stand up to Eros,” the minor premise is “to blame people for being ruled by Eros is to stand up to Eros,” and the conclusion is “to blame people for being ruled by Eros is foolish.” In this example, the minor premise is not explicitly stated, but implied by Deianeira's conclusion.

In the second part of her speech, Deianeira turns from an appeal to her own character as a good, understanding woman, to the character of Lichas, when she urges him to tell the whole truth “since it is an ignoble disgrace for a free man to be called a liar” (ἀλλ’ εἰπέ πᾶν τᾶληθές· ὡς ἐλευθέρω / ψευδεῖ καλεῖσθαι κῆρ πρόσεστιν οὐ καλή, 453-454). The appeal to Lichas’ status as a free man forms an implicit contrast with Deianeira’s argument about her and Heracles’ servitude to Eros. In Lichas’ case, Deianeira does not identify a divine third party who is responsible for his lies. Instead, Deianeira attributes the motivation for Lichas’ lies either to Heracles’ instruction or to Lichas himself (449-452). She rightly guesses that Lichas was afraid of distressing her by delivering the whole story (457-458; cf. 481-483), a justifiable fear, despite Deianeira’s claim to the contrary: κεί μὲν δέδοικας, οὐ καλῶς ταρβείς, ἐπεὶ / τὸ μὴ πυθέσθαι, τοῦτό μ’ ἀλγύνειεν ἄν (“And if you are afraid, you do not fear rightly, since not finding out, this would cause me pain,” 457-458). Deianeira suppresses the pain she actually feels because she is trying to play the part of a woman Lichas can trust with painful information.

This woman in her argument, who ignores and suppresses her emotions, is not the woman Deianeira has presented through her speeches and actions in the previous scenes of the play, but she acts the part well, pointing to aspects of her character that have already been established in the play – her desire to know the truth and her unusual capacity for sympathy:

τὸ δ’ εἰδέναι τί δεινόν; οὐχὶ χᾶτέρας
 πλείστας ἀνῆρ εἶς Ἡρακλῆς ἔγημε δῆ;
 κοῦπω τις αὐτῶν ἔκ γ’ ἐμοῦ λόγον κακὸν
 ἠνέγκατ’ οὐδ’ ὄνειδος· ἦδε τ’ οὐδ’ ἄν εἰ
 κάστ’ ἐντακείη τῷ φιλεῖν, ἐπεὶ σφ’ ἐγὼ
 ὄκτιρα δὴ μάλιστα προσβλέψασ’, ὅτι
 τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς τὸν βίον διώλεσεν,
 καὶ γῆν πατρώαν οὐχ ἔκοῦσα δύσμορος
 ἔπερσε κάδούλωσεν. (459-467)

Why is knowing terrible? Has not one man, Heracles,
 bedded the greatest number of other women?

And not yet has any one of them received an evil speech from me
nor a reproach, and this woman would not either, even if
she should be especially absorbed in loving him, since I
pitied her, indeed, most of all when I saw her,
because her beauty ruined her life,
and she, miserable one, by no fault of her own
caused her fatherland to be sacked and enslaved.

Deianeira logically refers to her knowledge of Heracles' infidelities and her past reactions to these affairs as evidence of how she will act in the present situation. Such an argument intentionally obscures her emotions: she is angry and hurt that Heracles has brought Iole home as a "secret wife" to replace his "chosen wife." In order to draw attention away from her anger and hurt, Deianeira highlights her spontaneous reaction of sympathy for Iole when she first saw her. Though Deianeira refuses to blame Iole, she is very much aware, as her speech to the Chorus makes clear, that Iole's presence threatens her position as Heracles' "trophy consort."³⁰⁸

In his initial response to Deianeira's speech, Lichas acknowledges that Deianeira's appeals to character and reason are effective:

ἀλλ', ὦ φίλη δέσποινα, ἐπεὶ σε μανθάνω
θνητὴν φρονούσαν θνητὰ κοῦκ ἀγνώμονα,
πάν σοι φράσω τᾶληθές οὐδὲ κρύψομαι. (472-474)

But, dear mistress, since I have learned that you are a mortal
who thinks mortal thoughts and are not without sense,
I will tell you everything, and I will not hide the truth.

He actually falls for her deception. He also verifies, after he reports in summary what the Messenger has already said, that he chose to lie of his own accord because he did not want to hurt her feelings:

ἀλλ' αὐτός, ὦ δέσποινα, δειμαίνων τὸ σὸν
μὴ στέρονον ἀλύνοιμι τοῖσδε τοῖς λόγοις,

³⁰⁸ Kyriakou (2011) 380 argues that Iole does not threaten Deianeira's position as legitimate wife, but rather her position as his "trophy consort."

ἤμαρτον, εἴ τι τῶνδ' ἄμαρτίαν νέμεις. (481-483)

But I myself, o mistress, fearing that I would
wound your heart with these stories,
made a mistake, if you consider any of these things a mistake.

Deianeira's speech, in presenting her character and reason above her emotions, has sought to silence these qualms of Lichas about hurting her. Yet the true story does hurt Deianeira, not only because she is afraid that her position as wife is threatened by a concubine (a fear most succinctly stated at 550-551), but also because she is even more utterly alone now than before she knew the truth, unable to connect with the captive woman who seemed, and disastrously turned out to be, so much like herself.

Though she pretends otherwise to Lichas, Deianeira's knowledge about Iole in fact inspires even greater panic, reminding her of the shock she felt when she too was a war bride. After the exchange with Lichas and the Choral interlude that vividly recalls the contest over Deianeira and highlights the devastating power of Cypris, Deianeira addresses the Chorus, making it explicit that she will tell them a different story than she told Lichas:

ἦμος, φίλαι, κατ' οἶκον ὁ ξένος θροεῖ
ταῖς αἰχμαλώτοις παισὶν ὡς ἐπ' ἐξόδῳ,
τῆμος θυραῖος ἦλθον ὡς ὑμᾶς λάθρα,
τὰ μὲν φράσουσα χερσὶν ἀτεχνησάμην,
τὰ δ' οἶα πάσχω συγκατοικτιομένη. (531-535)

While, dear women, the stranger is speaking in the house
to the captive girls as he is about to depart,
I have come out of doors to you in secret,
to tell you what I have devised with my hands,
and also to receive your sympathy for the things I have suffered.

Deianeira marks her intimacy with the Chorus by calling them φίλαι (531), “friends” or “dear women,” and her distance from Lichas by calling him ὁ ξένος (531), “the stranger.” She also indicates that her conversation with the Chorus is private – she has come to speak with them “in

secret” (λάθρα, 533) – as opposed to the more public speech she made to Lichas.³⁰⁹ These distinctions between friends and strangers, private and public are important for understanding the type of speech that Deianeira presents here, as opposed to the speech she gave to Lichas. Unlike her speech to Lichas, her speech to the Chorus does not privilege reason over emotion. Instead, she divulges her feelings of shock, panic, and fear. In explicitly requesting the Chorus’ consolation, moreover, Deianeira changes her mind about their ability to advise her (cf. 141-150). She recognizes that the Chorus is the closest thing she has to an understanding community of women, and she seeks their advice, though they do not speak with the authority of experience, because she has no one else to turn to.

Her intimacy with the Chorus allows her to divulge the negative feelings about Iole that she purposefully hid from Lichas. Whereas she referred to Iole with neutral terms in her speech to Lichas (cf. 444, 447, 463, 465), and ironically called her, along with the other captive women, a “gift” (δῶρα, 494), she instead portrays her to the Chorus as “a cargo insulting to my mind” (λωβητὸν ἐμπόλημα τῆς ἐμῆς φρενός, 538). Garner (1990, 103) argues that this shift in Deianeira’s rhetoric reflects a shift toward Clytemnestra’s attitude toward the concubine Cassandra.³¹⁰ Deianeira speaks freely to the Chorus, voicing her fears about being replaced

³⁰⁹ Murnaghan (2012) 225-226 notes the irony in the delivery of a private speech on stage: “The presence of the chorus as audience allows an interior scene of intimate revelation to be rehearsed on the open stage.”

³¹⁰ Garner compares Deianeira’s phrase λωβητὸν ἐμπόλημα τῆς ἐμῆς φρενός (*Trach.* 538) with Clytemnestra’s παροψώνημα τῆς ἐμῆς χλιδῆς (*Ag.* 1447), arguing that both women focus on the sexual insult the concubines represent, and that Deianeira’s phrase even has a similar rhythm and assonance to Clytemnestra’s. He concludes, “No matter how different Deianeira is from Clytemnestra, no matter how nonviolent her intentions, the allusion to the *Agamemnon* casts an ominous shadow over the plan she goes on to describe to the chorus.”

sexually by Iole, and her resentment toward Heracles for sending this woman in exchange for her long years of faithful housekeeping:

καὶ νῦν δὴ οὖσαι μίμονεν μᾶς ὑπὸ
χλαίνης ὑπαγκάλισμα. τοιάδ' Ἡρακλῆς,
ὁ πιστὸς ἡμῖν κάγαθὸς καλούμενος,
οἰκούρι' ἀντέπεμψε τοῦ μακροῦ χρόνου. (539-542)

And now we, who are two, wait for him, a single
object of embrace beneath a single blanket. Such things as these
Heracles, supposedly faithful to us and noble,
sent in exchange for the housework I did during this long time.

Her internal conflict between how she believes she should act and her feelings of resentment, fear, and anger is evident in her rapid reversals from denying to admitting these feelings:

ἐγὼ δὲ θυμοῦσθαι μὲν οὐκ ἐπίσταμαι
νοσοῦντι κείνῳ πολλὰ τῆδε τῆ νόσῳ,
τὸ δ' αὖ ξυνοικεῖν τῆδ' ὁμοῦ τίς ἂν γυνὴ
δύναιτο, κοινωνοῦσα τῶν αὐτῶν γάμων; (543-546)

But I do not know how to be angry
with that man, who is suffering greatly from this sickness;
but what woman, again, could live together with this girl,
sharing in the same marriage?

A few lines later in the same speech Deianeira again renounces her anger, adding that it is not socially appropriate for a good woman to be angry: ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ, ὅσπερ εἶπον, ὀργαίνειν καλὸν / γυναῖκα νοῦν ἔχουσαν (“But it is not, as I said, decent for a woman of sense to be angry,” 552-553). Her feeling that she has been slighted by Heracles’ choice of Iole as a bride in place of her (cf. 550-551) is in conflict with her knowledge that a good woman should not express anger.³¹¹ This scene thus dramatizes a conflict that many modern military wives also

³¹¹ See Konstan’s (2006) 42-43 discussion of anger as a response to a perceived slight. Against his argument that Deianeira does not feel anger toward Heracles because she is too weak, I argue that she *does* feel anger, but suppresses it because she knows that good wives don’t express anger toward their husbands, especially not in public.

feel: social expectations for women's behavior prevent wives from expressing their anger in an open, direct way, even if they think their anger is a legitimate response to being neglected, abused, or unloved;³¹² resentments are therefore harbored without any outlet, as Clytemnestra most memorably demonstrates in *Agamemnon*.

The writing on the mind: another trauma story

Deianeira introduces the magic philtre as a “remedy” both for her negative emotions of anger and resentment, which she believes are improper, and for Heracles’ “sickness”: ἦ δ’ ἔχω, φίλαι, / λυτήριον λύπημα, τῆδ’ ὑμῖν φράσω (“I will tell you about the way in which I can remedy pain,” 553-554). However, the story that she tells about her sexual assault by the centaur Nessus belies her presentation of the philtre as a remedy that will benefit her and Heracles.³¹³ Nessus harms her and is killed by Heracles in turn; the poison blood he offers is not intended to help her. Deianeira’s description of the centaur’s blood as a beneficial gift, her metaphor depicting his instructions as etched into her mind like writing on a bronze tablet (682-683), and her insistence on hiding the charm, both literally in the depths of the house and metaphorically by not speaking of it, indicate that she has not yet fully understood the implications of this traumatic event. As a way of eliding the trauma of her sexual assault, Deianeira perceives the centaur’s blood as a remedy rather than as the poison it truly is.

³¹² Andrea, wife of a Vietnam veteran interviewed by Matsakis (1996) 166-167, outlines this scenario: “At my very first counseling session, the therapist suggested that I was a very angry woman. The idea was totally unacceptable to me. To me, anger was ugly and to be an angry woman, well, that was almost the same as being a ‘bad’ one. ‘Good’ women, I had been taught, forgave quickly and did not harbor resentments. They were also experts at turning lemons into lemonade and at keeping their mouths shut when their husbands were upset.”

³¹³ On Nessus as a force of “malignant *eros*” in the play, see Parry (1986) 108: “The hostile intentions of Nessus infuse themselves into the image of deceptive, malignant *eros* that dominates the *Trachiniae*, an image to which he himself contributes as rapist, beguiler and persuader.”

Deianeira's narrative of his assault frames the story in terms of the "gift" she received from the centaur:

ἦν μοι παλαιὸν δῶρον ἀρχαίου ποτὲ
θηρός, λέβητι χαλκῆφ κεκρυμμένον,
ὃ παῖς ἔτ' οὔσα τοῦ δασυστέρνου παρὰ
Νέσσου φθίνοντος ἐκ φονῶν ἀνειλόμην,
ὃς τὸν βαθύρρουν ποταμὸν Εὐήνον βροτοῦς
μισθοῦ ἴπρευε χερσίν, οὔτε πομπίμοις
κώπαις ἐρέσσων οὔτε λαίφεσιν νεώς. (555-560)

I had an old gift from an ancient beast once,
hidden in a bronze urn,
which, when I was still a child, I took up
from the blood of shaggy-chested Nessus as he was dying,
who for a fee carried mortals across the deep-flowing river Evenus
with his hands, not rowing with guiding oars,
nor with the sails of a ship.

The repetition of "old" (παλαιόν, 555) and "ancient" (ἀρχαίου, 555), to refer to the gift and the centaur respectively firmly locates this incident in the past, and the particle ποτέ flags this part of her speech as the beginning of a story from Deianeira's past.³¹⁴ These time markers relate this story to Deianeira's opening account of the miseries of her past (cf. λόγος...ἀρχαίος, 1). As soon as she mentions the "ancient gift," Deianeira notes that it has been hidden in a bronze urn, an act of simultaneous preserving and burying.³¹⁵ Indeed, because the gift is actually Nessus' blood, the urn contains part of his remains, which Deianeira has both buried and preserved in the depths of her home and of her consciousness. Moreover, though Deianeira had been married to

³¹⁴ See Kraus (1991) 77 n. 8 on the conventional flags that mark each of the eleven stories told in the course of the play. See also Kraus (1991) 88 n. 37: "555 may deliberately echo line 1 since it begins the second of the play's two major story sequences."

³¹⁵ While λέβης typically refers to a kettle or cauldron for boiling water in the *Iliad* (9.123, 265, etc.) and a basin for washing one's hands or feet in the *Odyssey* (1.137, 4.53, etc.), in tragedy it usually refers to a cinerary urn. Cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 444, Aesch. *Cho.* 686, Soph. *El.* 1401. *Lebetes* were also used in the Greek marriage ceremony.

Heracles by this point in her story, she still refers to herself as a child (παῖς ἔτ' οὐσα, 557). The detail brings this earlier Deianeira closer in line with her audience of young Trachinian women, still children who have not yet experienced the sorrows of womanhood (141-152). The story, like her story in the prologue, explains one way in which she began to experience these sorrows, charting the fall from security to insecurity that is repeatedly linked with the experience of marriage in this play.

Deianeira also plants the important detail that Nessus carried people across the river with his *hands*, which she emphasizes by amplifying the instrumental dative with two negations in the subsequent clause, “not rowing with escorting oars nor with the sails of a ship” (559-560). This detail prepares for Deianeira’s description of the traumatic event:

ὃς κάμει, τὸν πατρῶον ἠνίκα στόλον
 ξὺν Ἡρακλεῖ τὸ πρῶτον εὐνις ἐσπόμεν,
 φέρων ἐπ’ ὤμοις, ἠνίκα ἢ ’ν μέσῳ πόρῳ,
 ψαύει ματαίαις χερσίν· ἐκ δ’ ἦυσ’ ἐγώ,
 χῶ Ζηνὸς εὐθύς παῖς ἐπιστρέψας χερσὶν
 ἤκεν κομήτην ἰόν· ἐς δὲ πλεύμονας
 στέρνων διερροίζησεν. (562-568)

And he, after my father sent me away, when I accompanied
 Heracles for the first time as his wife,
 he, carrying me on his shoulders, when I was in the middle of the passage,
 touches me with lustful hands. And I shouted out,
 and the son of Zeus immediately turned around and shot
 a feathered arrow with his hands. It whizzed through
 the lungs in his chest.

Deianeira sets the scene for her assault in terms of her recent departure from her father and marriage to Heracles, another event embroiled in violence. When Deianeira describes how Nessus sexually assaulted her in the middle of the river, she switches from the past to the present tense (ψαύει, 565), which makes Nessus’ action more vivid, as if she is reliving the trauma as she tells the story.

In this passage Deianeira does not record her own reaction, emotional or otherwise, to the assault. Instead, she narrates Heracles' quick and violent response. As in the contest with Achelous, Heracles "saves" Deianeira by taking violent action. Yet Heracles also unintentionally brings about this mid-river assault. As Deianeira's new κύριος (guardian), Heracles is responsible for her safe passage between her father's house and her new home.³¹⁶ His decision to entrust his bride's passage to a centaur, a mythological creature notorious for its lust, demonstrates neglect of his role as κύριος, a neglect that Deianeira has discussed in other aspects of their married life. Though Deianeira does not blame Heracles for the assault, her narrative raises the question: why did Heracles allow a centaur to carry his new bride across the river in the first place? According to Apollodorus *Bibl.* II 5.4, Nessus fled to the river Evenus after his defeat in a battle against Pholos and Heracles, an incident that Heracles later mentions at *Trach.* 1095, in an enumeration of his many labors. The case for Heracles' neglect could be stated in even stronger terms: why would Heracles entrust his wife to a known enemy?³¹⁷ Though this question is never answered in Deianeira's narrative, Heracles' neglect as a guardian in this crucial moment, as the "child" Deianeira passes from her father's house to her new husband's, may explain the crack that opens in her trust of Heracles as the centaur offers her a love-charm to counteract his future infidelities.

Deianeira preserves the centaur's dying words exactly in direct speech:³¹⁸

³¹⁶ On the exchange of a woman's guardianship from the father to the husband in marriage, see Just (1989) 26-30, Ormand (1999) 19, Foley (2001) 8.

³¹⁷ Reference to Apollodorus cited by Kamerbeek (1959) *ad* 558, who remarks, "we may not be far wrong if we consider Nessus' assault as an act of revenge" for this previous battle.

³¹⁸ Kraus (1991) 88 argues that Deianeira quotes the centaur directly in order to increase the trustworthiness of her report. Scodel (1984) 41 mentions the prophetic power of Heracles' dying words, and Kraus (1991) 88 n. 39 connects this idea with Nessus' dying words. Kraus (1991) 88 n. 39 also adds

ἐκθνήσκων δ' ὁ θῆρ
τοσοῦτον εἶπε· “παῖ γέροντος Οἰνέως,
τοσόνδ' ὀνήση τῶν ἐμῶν, ἐὰν πίθη,
πορθμῶν, ὀθούνεχ' ὑστάτην σ' ἔπεμψ' ἐγώ·
ἐὰν γὰρ ἀμφίθρεπτον αἶμα τῶν ἐμῶν
σφαγῶν ἐνέγκῃ χερσίν, ἧ μελαγχόλους
ἔβαψεν ἰοὺς θρέμμα Λερναίας ὕδρας,³¹⁹
ἔσται φρενός σοι τοῦτο κηλητήριον
τῆς Ἡρακλείας, ὥστε μήτιν' εἰσιδὼν
στέροξει γυναῖκα κείνος ἀντὶ σοῦ πλέον.” (568-577)

While dying, the beast said
so much as this: “Child of old Oeneus,
you will benefit so much from my passage,
if you obey me, since I conveyed you across last.
For if you carry away with your hands the blood
clotted around my wound, where the monstrous
Lernaean Hydra dyed his arrows poisoned with black bile,
this will be a love charm for you to use on the mind
of Heracles, so that he will not see and love
any woman instead of you more.”

By misrepresenting the outcome of his assault on Deianeira as a benefit to her (τοσόνδ' ὀνήση, 570), the centaur obscures the harm that he has caused. He also plays upon the fears of a vulnerable new bride by offering his clotted blood as a love charm. Deianeira follows his instructions exactly, hiding the gift at once in the secrecy of her home: τοῦτ' ἐννοήσασ', ὦ φίλοι, δόμοις γὰρ ἦν / κείνου θανόντος ἐγκεκλιμένον καλῶς (“I kept this in mind, friends, for ever since he died it has been shut up securely in the house,” 578-579). By mentioning again that she hid the charm, Deianeira reinforces the cruelty of the centaur's instructions, which force

that direct speech is a constant feature of the later narratives in the play: “The effect is at least partly to demonstrate the insistence with which the past increasingly encroaches on the present.”

³¹⁹ I have retained the reading of the codices (μελαγχόλους... ἰοὺς) instead of Dobree's emendation, printed by Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990). Easterling (1982) *ad* 572-575 provides several possible translations to explain the reading of the codices.

silence upon his victim by requiring her to conceal her experience of sexual assault in order for the “charm” to work.³²⁰

Despite her confusion about what the charm truly represents (benefit or harm), Deianeira detects something shameful in the deed:

κακὰς δὲ τόλμας μήτ' ἐπισταίμην ἐγὼ
μήτ' ἐκμάθοιμι, τὰς τε τολμώσας στυγῶ.
φίλτροις δ' ἐάν πως τήνδ' ὑπερβαλώμεθα
τὴν παίδα καὶ θέλκτροισι τοῖς ἐφ' Ἡρακλεῖ,
μεμηγάνηται τοῦργον, εἴ τι μὴ δοκῶ
πράσσειν μάταιον· εἰ δὲ μή, πεπαύσομαι. (582-587)

May I neither know nor learn about evil deeds of daring,
and I hate women who have undertaken them.
But if somehow we may surpass this girl with love-spells
and charms used on Heracles,
the deed has been contrived, unless I seem to do
something rash. If I do, I will refrain from it.

With her sudden condemnation of women who perform daring deeds, Deianeira attempts to distance herself from deeds like this, but also draws attention to her own use of a love-charm as a daring deed. Her qualification, “unless I seem to do something rash” (εἴ τι μὴ δοκῶ / πράσσειν μάταιον, 586-587) connects her own action with the centaur’s violent assault: “he touches me with rash hands” (ψαύει μαπαίαις χερσίν, 565).³²¹ This verbal echo reveals the love-charm’s violent, rash origin, which forbodes disaster in its application.

Deianeira concludes the account of her sexual assault and the “remedy” that it has provided by requesting the Chorus’ advice. Though capable of offering Deianeira sympathy, the Chorus’ inexperience prevents them from recognizing the potential harm in this story of benefit

³²⁰ The repetition also indicates that Deianeira is concluding her speech (ring composition).

³²¹ Kyriakou (2011) 390-392 argues that Deianeira’s act is not criminal, but “rash,” in that she, like Nessus, fails to make the necessary calculations in her decision-making.

arising from violence. They respond that Deianeira's plan seems good: ἀλλ' εἴ τις ἐστὶ πίστις ἐν τοῖς δρωμένοις, / δοκεῖς παρ' ἡμῖν οὐ βεβουλεύσθαι κακῶς ("But if there is any ground for confidence in these things being done, you seem to us not to have planned poorly," 588-589). Deianeira's trust (πίστις, 588) in the centaur's "love-charm," however, is disastrously misplaced, and reflects her confusion about whom or what to trust: Lichas, Iole, Heracles, and the Chorus have all proven to be unreliable for different reasons. Yet in her desperation to do something, Deianeira accepts the Chorus' naïve opinion.³²²

Despite the Chorus' approval, Deianeira has a nagging feeling that she is doing something shameful: μόνον παρ' ὑμῶν εὖ στεγοίμεθ'· ὡς σκότῳ / κὰν αἰσχρὰ πράσσης, οὐποτ' αἰσχύνῃ πεσῆ, ("Only let us be covered well by you; for in darkness, even if you do shameful things, you will never fall to shame," 596-597). Deianeira's words are surprising to many scholars, leading some even to say that she knows in advance the harm that the robe will cause.³²³ Her request to the Chorus not to speak about her actions, however, attests not to Deianeira's malicious foreknowledge of the outcome, but to the shame she felt from her experience of sexual assault, which, though not her fault, continues to haunt her,³²⁴ and also from

³²² Survivors need realistic judgments to diminish feelings of humiliation and guilt. The Chorus is an example of a naively accepting audience: "naively accepting views attempt to dismiss questions of moral judgment with the assertion that such concerns are immaterial in circumstances of limited choice. The moral emotions of shame and guilt, however, are not obliterated, even in these situations" (Herman 1992, 66). Solmsen (1985) argues, by contrast, that the Chorus in fact advises caution in this scene, and that Deianeira fails to understand them, as their process of deliberation is interrupted by Lichas. See also Hall (2009) 70-71, 86-87, who argues that the crisis of the play is caused by "Deianeira's incompetence at deliberation," which she connects with fifth-century Athenian views about women's inability to deliberate on their own.

³²³ Errandonea (1927) 157 views Deianeira's statement at 596-597 as tantamount to a confession of guilt. See also Albin (1968) 262-270 and LaRue (1965) esp. 216-233.

³²⁴ See Gellie (1972) 66: "The using of the philtre looks forward to an innocent and laudable end, but the philtre itself comes to her out of a world of monsters, physical assault and violent death." He goes on to say, incorrectly I think, that "Deianeira feels shame not for the kind of sin that interests gods or jurymen, but for her single venture into unwomanliness, now that her feminine powers have failed her." It is not

her decision to employ the love-charm, an underhanded method of regaining the love of her husband.³²⁵ Aristotle writes that shame is felt before those who are likely to tell others what we have done: “for not proclaiming it is the same as not believing it” (Ar. *Rhet.* 2.6, 1383b12-14).³²⁶ Deianeira asks the Chorus not to proclaim her deed as a way of denying her shame, of covering it up again in the depths of her being. She does not delve into the question of whether it is right – or even possible – to achieve something good through means that are shameful, in part because of her desperation for a positive outcome, in part because of her feelings of panic and confusion.³²⁷ The Chorus of young women, because of their inexperience, allow her to avoid confronting this moral dilemma for a little longer.³²⁸

The darkness in which Deianeira hides these shameful things (αἰσχρόα, 597) is also a metaphor for her ignorance of them. She does not fully comprehend the centaur’s intent in giving

“her single venture into unwomanliness,” but the circumstances of her sexual assault that make her feel shame, in addition to the underhanded use of a love-charm. I do not see anything essentially unwomanly or womanly about this decision.

³²⁵ See Gellie (1972) 65-66: “Her shame begins in the very need for artfulness in her attempt to hold Heracles.” Kamerbeek (1959) 138 *ad* 596, following Whitman (1951) 115, 266, argues that πρόσσειν here means “to fare”: “If this is right, the words must refer to her being put to shame in the event of her attempt falling flat; then, if nobody discloses the means by which she tried to win back Heracles’ love, the shame will be for herself alone and she will not fall disgracefully.” See also Hester (1980) 7.

³²⁶ Quoted by Konstan (2006) 104. For a discussion of shame in Sophocles, see Cairns (1993) 215-264, who does not, however, discuss the *Trachiniae*.

³²⁷ On Deianeira’s “fudging of the moral issue” here, see Lawrence (2013) 133: “Deianeira then, like Neoptolemus under the influence of Odysseus in *Philoctetes*, is prepared to fudge the moral issue, allowing the end to justify the means, provided that all’s well that ends well. She does not specifically *argue* that what she sees as the probable success of the attempt morally justifies the interference; her emotional commitment to the successful outcome is sufficient” (emphasis in original).

³²⁸ Herman (1992) 69 writes, “The survivor’s shame and guilt may be exacerbated by the harsh judgment of others, but it is not fully assuaged by simple pronouncements absolving her from responsibility, because simple pronouncements, even favorable ones, represent a refusal to engage with the survivor in the lacerating moral complexities of the extreme situation. From those who bear witness, the survivor seeks not absolution but fairness, compassion, and the willingness to share the guilty knowledge of what happens to people in extremity.” The Chorus’ inexperience prevents them from fully engaging with the moral complexities of Deianeira’s situation.

her the love-charm until the charm is exposed to the light. Secrecy, in fact, was part of the centaur's explicit instructions:

ἐγὼ γὰρ ὦν ὁ θήρ με Κένταυρος, πονῶν
πλευρὰν πικρᾶ γλωχίνι, προὔδιδάξατο
παρήκα θεσμῶν οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ἐσφζόμην,
χαλκῆς ὅπως δύσνιπτον ἐκ δέλτου γραφήν·
[καί μοι τάδ' ἦν πρόρρητα καὶ τοιαῦτ' ἔδρων·]
τὸ φάρμακον τοῦτ' ἄπυρον ἀκτίνος τ' ἀεὶ
θερμῆς ἄθικτον ἐν μυχοῖς σφζειν ἐμέ,
ἕως ἂν ἀρτίχριστον ἀρμόσαιμί που.
κᾶδρων τοιαῦτα. νῦν δ', ὅτ' ἦν ἐργαστέον,
ἔχρισα μὲν κατ' οἶκον ἐν δόμοις κρυφῆ
μαλλῶ, σπάσασα κτησίου βοτοῦ λάχνην,
κᾶθηκα συμπτύξασ' ἀλαμπῆς ἡλίου
κοίλῳ ζυγάστρω δῶρον, ὥσπερ εἶδετε. (680-692)

For I left out none of the injunctions, which the beastly centaur,
while he was suffering from the sharp barb in his side,
instructed beforehand, but preserved them,
like writing that is difficult to wash off from a bronze tablet.
[And these things were proclaimed to me and I did such things as these:]
I preserved this remedy untouched by fire and the constantly hot
ray of the sun in the inmost part of the house,
until I should apply it freshly spread somewhere.
And I did such things as these. But just now, when it had to be done,
I rubbed it in with wool at home, inside, in secret,
having drawn the soft wool from our own flock,
and I put the gift, having folded it together, out of the sun's light
in a hollow chest, just as you saw.

Deianeira's comparison of her memory of the centaur's instructions, which she describes as laws (θεσμῶν, 682), to writing indelibly inscribed on a tablet recalls observations of the memories of survivors of trauma, whose accounts of the traumatic event remain fixed, as if imprinted indelibly on the mind.³²⁹ The centaur has inscribed his will indelibly upon Deianeira through his

³²⁹ Lt. Col. Roy R. Grinker and Major John P. Spiegel (1947) 371 describe "shell shock" in WWI and WWII soldiers as follows: "No matter how severe may have been the stimuli that precipitated the neuroses, the effect is not like the writing on a slate that can be erased, leaving the slate as it was before.

violent act.³³⁰ Furthermore, the centaur’s instructions emphasize the need for secrecy and silence, for hiding the charm in a secret place deep within the house, the importance of which Deianeira indicates with emphatic repetition: ἐν μυχοῖς (686), κατ’ οἶκον ἐν δόμοις κρυφῆ (689). While the centaur does not want Deianeira to forget the charm or his instructions, he also wants the charm to be shrouded in secrecy. Silence and secrecy ensure that Deianeira will not realize the true nature of the “charm” until it is too late.³³¹ The conspiracy of silence and trauma,³³² a horrible event that cannot be forgotten by the victim but that is powerfully silenced by the perpetrator of the violence, helps to explain Deianeira’s confusion about the charm and the panicked decision that she makes.

The deadly effects of the charm become clear to Deianeira only after she accidentally exposes to the sun a piece of sheep’s wool dipped in the poison. She describes in vivid language what happens to the piece of wool:

τοιόνδε κείται προπετές· ἐκ δὲ γῆς, ὅθεν
 προὔκειτ’, ἀναζέουσι θρομβώδεις ἀφροί,
 γλαυκῆς ὀπώρας ὥστε πίονος ποτοῦ
 χυθέντος ἐς γῆν Βακχίας ἀπ’ ἀμπέλου. (701-704)

This thing lies there, discarded. But from the earth,
 where it was lying before, clotted foam boils up,
 like the rich drink of gleaming fruit
 poured from the Bacchic vine onto the earth.

Combat leaves a lasting impression on men’s minds, changing them as radically as any crucial experience through which they live.” Quoted by Herman (1992) 32.

³³⁰ See duBois (1988) 154-155: “His words are unwashably (*dusnipton*), irremovably engraved in her; she has been inscribed, her seal broken, not by her husband but by this horse/man.”

³³¹ The perpetrator of violence enforces silence and secrecy in his victim in order to escape responsibility for a crime, or, as in this case, to ensure that he can continue committing crimes. See Herman (1992) 8: “In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator’s first line of defense.”

³³² On “the negative synergy of trauma and silence, abuse and secrecy,” see Brown (1986) 15.

The clotted purple-red bubbling of the wool recalls a bleeding wound,³³³ and sparks Deianeira's realization that the centaur, in providing the "charm," did not intend to help her:

πόθεν γὰρ ἄν ποτ', ἀντὶ τοῦ θνήσκων ὁ θῆρ
ἐμοὶ παρέσχ' εὖνοιαν, ἧς ἔθνησχ' ὕπερ;
οὐκ ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ τὸν βαλόντ' ἀποφθίσει
χρήζων ἔθειλέ μ'· ὦν ἐγὼ μεθύστερον,
ὅτ' οὐκέτ' ἀρκεῖ, τὴν μάθησιν ἄρνυμαι. (707-711)

Why in the world, in return for what would the dying beast
have provided a favor to me, on whose account he was dying?
It is not possible. But he charmed me, wishing
to kill the one who shot him. Of these things I win
understanding too late, when it no longer helps.

By trusting the centaur once more, Deianeira has unwittingly re-enacted the scene of her trauma.³³⁴ Still under the centaur's spell (ἔθειλέ με, 710), she makes use of the centaur's "help," without stopping to think about whether his intentions were good or not. The same circumstances led to her sexual assault. Not stopping to think about the centaur's intentions, Heracles made use of his help in conveying Deianeira across the river. Only when it is too late does Deianeira recognize, as before, the danger.³³⁵

When she discovers her mistake, Deianeira immediately blames only herself for the decision to send the robe: μόνη γὰρ αὐτόν, εἴ τι μὴ ψευσθήσομαι / γνώμης, ἐγὼ δύστηνος ἐξαποφθερῶ ("For, if I will not be mistaken in my judgment, I alone, wretched one, will

³³³ Especially θρομβώδεις. Cf. Hipp. *De mulierum affectibus* 11.

³³⁴ See Herman (1992) 40: "More commonly, traumatized people find themselves reenacting some aspect of the trauma scene in disguised form, without realizing what they are doing."

³³⁵ See Herman (1992) 69: "Reviewing the rape scenario after the fact, many women report ignoring their own initial perceptions of danger, thereby losing the opportunity for escape. Fear of conflict or social embarrassment may prevent victims from taking action in time. Later, survivors who have disregarded their own 'inner voice' may be furiously critical of their own 'stupidity' or 'naiveté.'" By sending the charm before testing it, Deianeira reenacts this aspect of her assault scenario in particular: she ignores her initial perceptions of danger because of the panic inspired by Iole.

destroy him,” 712-713). Sophocles has carefully shown, however, that Deianeira is not the only one responsible for Heracles’ death – traumatic past events in her life, her lack of support and alienation from family members and friends, her panicked reaction to Iole, and the centaur’s deception have all contributed to the decision that she makes. Indeed, Heracles also eventually recognizes that she was not the sole or even primary cause of his painful death (1159-1163). Yet Deianeira fiercely blames herself, as many victims do, for repeating the mistake of trusting the centaur despite her own misgivings.

Her shame is compounded by her knowledge that as soon as the robe sees the light, everyone will know to blame her:

καίτοι δέδοκται, κείνος εἰ σφαλήσεται,
ταύτῃ σὺν ὀρμῇ κάμῃ συνθανεῖν ἅμα.
ζῆν γὰρ κακῶς κλύουσαν οὐκ ἀνασχετόν,
ἦτις προτιμᾷ μὴ κακῇ πεφυκέναι. (719-722)

And indeed, I have decided, if that man is defeated,
that I will die at the same time, with the same stroke.
For it is not tolerable for anyone who esteems being noble by nature
to live with a bad reputation.

The public aspect of her mistake – that she will be even further alienated from her community and family as a result of her use of the love charm – motivates her decision to die along with Heracles. This decision to accompany Heracles in death, emphasized by the repetition of words for “together” (**ταύτῃ σὺν ὀρμῇ κάμῃ συνθανεῖν ἅμα**, 720), also represents a final attempt by Deianeira to reclaim her identity as Heracles’ wife, as one fated to live and die with him.³³⁶ By

³³⁶ For the idea that “dying with” is merely a variation for a wife on “living with” one’s husband, see Loraux (1987) 24-25, and Panoussis (2002) 129, who sums up: “pour la *physis* d’une épouse d’ailleurs comme Déjanire, le συνθανεῖν n’est que la variation mortelle du συννοικεῖν.”

viewing her death in this way, she attempts to establish a final connection with her husband, to deny that in fact she will die, as she lived, miserably alone.

The Chorus again attempts to console Deianeira, encouraging her not to jump to the worst conclusions. They also point out that Deianeira is not to blame for the mistake because she did not commit harm voluntarily: ἀλλ' ἀμφὶ τοῖς σφαλείσι μὴ ᾽ξ ἐκουσίας / ὀργὴ πέπειρα, τῆς σε τυγχάνειν πρόπει (“But when people are tripped up involuntarily, anger is mild, which it is fitting for you to experience,” 727-728).³³⁷ As before, Deianeira rejects the Chorus’ consolation because they do not understand what it is like to be in her position: τοιαῦτά τ᾽ ἄν λέξειεν οὐχ ὁ τοῦ κακοῦ / κοινωνός, ἀλλ' ὧ μὴδὲν ἔστ' οἴκοι βαρὺ (“Such things would one say who is not a partner in the wicked deed, but who has no burden in her own life,” 729-730). With the realization of her mistake, Deianeira retreats again from trusting the Chorus. She now feels even more isolated than before, the partner only of trouble and evil deeds.³³⁸

Losing faith

Deianeira’s connection to other people is directly challenged by the discovery of the poisonous properties of the love-charm she sent and the horrific effects it has on Heracles.³³⁹ The response that most violently unhinges Deianeira’s attachments to family, community, and self is

³³⁷ The Chorus’ μὴ ᾽ξ ἐκουσίας echoes Deianeira’s earlier description of Iole as involuntarily (οὐχ ἐκούσα, 466) causing the destruction and enslavement of her city.

³³⁸ For the double meaning of the word τοῦ κακοῦ, see Kamerbeek (1959) *ad* 729.

³³⁹ On the damage to relationships caused by traumatic events, see Herman (1992) 51: “Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis. The damage to relational life is not a secondary effect of trauma, as originally thought. Traumatic events have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community.”

her son Hyllus' vehement blame. He has just witnessed the terrifying sight of his father eaten alive by the robe that Deianeira sent. The agony caused by the robe provokes Heracles, in his fury, to hurl the herald Lichas to a violent and senseless death (779-781).³⁴⁰ Hyllus' witnessing of his father's trauma leads him to call into question his relationship to his mother, who apparently caused these events:

ὦ μήτερο, ὡς ἂν ἐκ τριῶν σ' ἐν εἰλόμην,
ἢ μηκέτ' εἶναι ζῶσαν, ἢ σεσωμένην
ἄλλου κεκληῆσθαι μητέρ', ἢ λώους φρένας
τῶν νῦν παρουσῶν τῶνδ' ἀμείψασθαί ποθεν. (734-737)

O mother, I would choose one of three things:
either that you should no longer be living, or if saved,
that you should be called someone else's mother, or that you should take
a better mind from somewhere in exchange for the mind you have now.

At the end of the play, however, after Hyllus realizes how wrong he was to blame his mother, he instead calls into question his relationship with the gods, asking how they could look on, undisturbed by such immense suffering:

αἴρετ', ὀπαδοί, μεγάλην μὲν ἐμοὶ
τούτων θέμενοι συγγνωμοσύνην,
μεγάλην δὲ θεῶν ἀγνωμοσύνην
εἰδότες ἔργων τῶν πρασσομένων,
οἱ φύσαντες καὶ κληζόμενοι
πατέρες τοιαύτ' ἐφορῶσι πάθη. (1264-1269)

Lift him up, servants, establishing great
sympathy with me for these things,
and knowing the great lack of feeling of the gods
for the deeds being accomplished,
who, having produced children and being called
fathers, look on such sufferings as these.

³⁴⁰ Garner (1990) 107 argues that Heracles' manner of killing Lichas echoes the Cyclops' manner of killing Odysseus' men. Through this allusion, Sophocles highlights Heracles' savagery in this moment.

The horrific loss of his two parents causes Hyllus to doubt the compassion of the gods, and specifically the compassion of the gods as parents. His reproach implicates, without naming, Heracles' divine parent, Zeus. Though the final line of the play emphasizes Zeus' presence, if not his compassion (κούδεν τούτων ὅ τι μὴ Ζεὺς, "there is nothing here that is not Zeus," 1278), Hyllus feels completely alienated from family and the gods as a result of the trauma he has witnessed.³⁴¹

Deianeira, too, loses faith in the possibility of reestablishing a connection with her family and community when she is verbally disowned by her son and coldly rejected by her husband. Hyllus reports that, in Heracles' mad pain, he would hurl himself to the ground and curse his marriage: τὸ δυσπάρεινον λέκτρον ἐνδατούμενος / σοῦ τῆς ταλαίνης καὶ τὸν Οἰνέως γάμον / οἶον κατακτῆσαιτο λυμαντὴν βίου ("dwelling on his ill-mated marriage with you, wretched one, and the alliance with Oeneus, saying what a destroyer of his life he had got for himself," 791-793). Her son's speech, which harshly blames and curses her for killing Heracles (cf. also 773, 807-812), confirms her overly critical judgment that she alone is responsible for the crime, and her silent exit after hearing Hyllus' report testifies more to her self-blame and alienation than any speech could have.

Both the Chorus and Hyllus remark upon Deianeira's silent exit, drawing attention to this important stage action.³⁴² As she exits, Hyllus again questions Deianeira's right to the name

³⁴¹ Some manuscripts attribute the final lines to the Chorus, others to Hyllus. For discussion, see Easterling (1982) *ad* 1275-1278, Webb (1983) and Verdenius (1983).

³⁴² See Easterling (1982) *ad* 813-820. On women's silent exits to suicide in tragedy (citing Deianeira, Eurydice in *Antigone* and Jocasta's semi-silence in *OT*), Loraux (1987) 21 remarks, "These silences, which are heard as an expression of anguish, precede an action that the woman wants to hide from view." See also Garrison (1995) 54-55, who views silence and secrecy as a character trait of Deianeira. For Rood (2010) 356, Deianeira's silent exit relates to the theme of knowledge and interpretation: "In order to solve

“mother,” a role she tried so hard to perform well, as she worried constantly about her children and husband:

ὄγκον γὰρ ἄλλως ὀνόματος τί δεῖ τρέφειν
μητροῦον, ἥτις μηδὲν ὡς τεκούσα δοῶ;
ἀλλ’ ἐρπέτω χαίρουσα· τὴν δὲ τέρψιν ἦν
τὼμῳ δίδωσι πατρὶ, τήνδ’ αὐτὴ λάβοι. (817-820)

For why must I cherish anyway the dignity
of the name “mother,” for one who does not act like a mother?
But let her go, rejoicing, and the delight which
she gives to my father, may she take this for herself.

The categories of his world have been reversed: his mother is no longer mother, but murderer, and delight (τέρψιν, 819) means its opposite, pain and death. Hyllus, as a survivor of the traumatic events unfolding onstage,³⁴³ demonstrates the damage to relational life that is characteristic of trauma survivors. Deianeira and Heracles have also suffered this damage: the utter alienation from family and community and the reversal of familiar categories as the free man becomes a slave, the home becomes a distant field, the truth becomes lies, certain knowledge becomes complete uncertainty. As the two halves of the play converge around their son, the bridge between them, their trauma is focalized through his reactions to it, his personal traumatic experience of his parents’ complete devastation. Through Hyllus, Sophocles touches

the problem of how others will interpret her actions, Deianeira aims, through silence, to simply remove herself as an object for interpretation.”

³⁴³ On survivors in tragedy, Murnaghan (1999) 107 writes, “Greek tragedy is notable for the mediated, indirect way in which it presents death and other forms of violence and suffering. It keeps those experiences of *pathos* offstage and informs us of them through the reports of witnesses, foregrounding the activities of observing, describing, and responding to the deaths of others. It is through the responses of survivors that the audience of tragedy knows death.”

upon Aeschylus' theme in the *Oresteia*: how the experience of trauma is passed almost inevitably from generation to generation.³⁴⁴

Since Deianeira has confided in the Chorus, they are the best witnesses to the assault by Nessus and its influence upon her decision to send the robe. As observers, more removed from the horrifying events than Hyllus, they are the first to recognize the cruel ambiguity of the oracle, in which Heracles' release from pain really meant death (828-830). Unlike Hyllus, they express sympathy for both Deianeira and Heracles because they know that the story is more complicated than the one that Hyllus has imagined, and they provide a defense of Deianeira in the same ode in which they mourn for Heracles:

ὦν ἄδ' ἅ τλάμων ἄοκνος,
μεγάλαν προσορώσα δόμοισι
βλάβαν νέων αἴσσου-
σαν γάμων τὰ μὲν αὐτὰ
προσέβαλεν, τὰ δ' ἀπ' ἀλλόθρου
γνώμας μολόντ' ὀλεθρίαισι συναλλαγαῖς
ἦ που ὀλοὰ στένει,
ἦ που ἀδινῶν χλωρὰν
τέγγει δακρῦων ἄχναν. (841-848)

All this the wretched woman, unshrinking,
applied, on the one hand, herself,
because she saw the great harm
of the new marriage
rushing upon the house, but on the other hand, these things
came about from another's intention at a destructive meeting;
surely somewhere she laments the deadly things,
surely somewhere she wets her pale face
with dewy, thick-falling tears.

³⁴⁴ Recent scientific research, which has measured cortisol levels in the children of Holocaust survivors and the children of women who were pregnant and present in the World Trade Center during the 9/11 attacks, has determined that trauma can be passed on to one's children epigenetically. See, for example, Yehuda et al. (2007) and Yehuda and Bierer (2008).

The Chorus' description of Deianeira corresponds to their earlier sympathetic representations of her as a constantly lamenting bird or a calf bereft of its mother (cf. 105-107, 529-530): she laments her ruin with thick, dewy tears (847-848). As Hyllus will do after he discovers that Deianeira is not entirely to blame, the Chorus looks instead to Olympus for a divine source for these sufferings: ἄ δ' ἀμφίπολος Κύπρις ἄναυδος φανερὰ / τῶνδ' ἐφάνη πράκτωρ ("Kypris, the silent attendant, has been revealed clearly as the agent of these things," 860-861). Again, as a contrast to Hyllus, who grieves for the loss of his parents and is preoccupied with parental injustice, blaming Zeus (1266-1269), the more objective Chorus instead identifies the agent as Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual desire who was present at the first traumatic event in Deianeira's life, the contest between Achelous and Zeus (497, 515-516), at the second traumatic event, when Nessus sexually assaulted her and then offered her a love charm, and is now silently present (ἀμφίπολος...ἄναυδος, 860) at the third and final event, her suicide.³⁴⁵

The description of Deianeira's actions after her silent retreat into the house, reported by her Nurse, emphasizes her feelings of alienation from family, gods, and community:

ἐπεὶ παρήλθε δωμάτων εἴσω μόνη,
καὶ παῖδ' ἐν ἀυλαίς εἶδε κοῖλα δέμνια
στορνύνθ', ὅπως ἄψορρον ἀντῶη πατρί,
κρούψασ' ἑαυτὴν ἔνθα μὴ τις εἰσίδοι,
βρυχάτο μὲν βωμοῖσι προσπίπτουσ' ὅτι
γένοιτ' ἐρήμη,³⁴⁶ κλαίει δ' ὀργάνων ὄτου

³⁴⁵ Parry (1986) 105-108 calls attention to the similarities between Aphrodite and the Erinyes, both capable of being helpful and harmful.

³⁴⁶ Instead of the reading of the codices, γένοιτ' ἐρήμη, Jebb (2004, orig. 1892), Easterling (1982), and Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990) prefer γένοιτ' ἐρήμοι, Nauck's emendation, on the grounds that Nauck's reading suits the context better. See Jebb (2004, orig. 1892) *ad* 904 ff.: "But the other reading [γένοιτ' ἐρήμοι] is in truer harmony with the context, because she is saying *farewell* to the surroundings of happier days. Even inanimate objects move her tears at the thought of parting. Naturally the altars come first; when they were forsaken, the family life would have ceased" (emphasis in the original). I have no objection to γένοιτ' ἐρήμη, since I think that this passage calls attention to Deianeira's feeling that she has been abandoned by family, community, and even gods.

ψάυσειεν οἷς ἐχρήτο δειλαία πάρος·
ἄλλη δὲ κάλλη δωμάτων στρωφωμένη,
εἷ του φίλων βλέψειεν οἰκετῶν δέμας,
ἔκλαιεν ἢ δύστηνος εἰσορωμένη,
αὐτὴ τὸν αὐτῆς δαίμον' ἀνακαλουμένη.
[καὶ τὰς ἄπαιδας ἐς τὸ λοιπὸν οὐσίας.]³⁴⁷ (900-911)

When she came inside the house alone
and saw her son making up the empty bed
in the courtyard in order to go back and meet his father,
she hid herself where no one could see her
and as she fell upon the altars, she cried out
that she was alone, and she wept whenever
she touched one of the implements that she, wretched, had used before,
and while roaming here and there in the house,
if ever she saw the form of one of her dear servants,
she, looking at them wretchedly, would weep,
invoking again her own fate,
[and the household childless in the future.]

Deianeira's emotional and physical isolation is marked by her position and actions inside the house. While Hyllus prepares a bed for his father in the courtyard, evidence of his connection with and fealty to his father, Deianeira goes alone (μόνη, 900) into the house in order to hide. She laments her alienation from the gods while falling on the altars (904-905). Finally, as she prepares to commit suicide, even the mundane objects that she used in the house and the sight of her servants cause her to weep (905-910). The absence of family and friends in these final moments of her life is made tragically apparent through her tearful farewells to objects and servants instead of the people supposedly closest to her.

³⁴⁷ Easterling (1982) *ad* 910-911 outlines the difficulties of this line, which has long been suspected by editors. The sense, however, is clear: Deianeira laments both her own fate and that of her household and family.

The last object to which Deianeira says goodbye is her marriage bed.³⁴⁸ The nurse quotes her direct speech:³⁴⁹

“ὦ λέχη τε καὶ νυμφεῖ’ ἐμά,
τὸ λοιπὸν ἤδη χαιρέθ’, ὡς ἔμ’ οὔποτε
δέξεσθ’ ἔτ’ ἐν κοίταισι ταῖσδ’ εὐνάτριαν.” (920-922)

“O my marriage bed and bridal chamber,
goodbye already for ever, since you will never
receive me again to lie upon this surface.”

As a symbol of her marriage to Heracles and of sex, the bed represents the *locus* of Deianeira’s emotional trauma. Earlier in the play, she imagined herself and Iole waiting for Heracles in this bed beneath a single blanket: καὶ νῦν δὴ οὔσαι μίμνομεν μᾶς ὑπὸ / χλαίνης ὑπαγκάλισμα (“And now we two women wait beneath a single blanket for his embrace,” 539-540). By killing herself on her marriage-bed, Deianeira puts into action her plan to “die with” her husband, as a testament to her marriage (cf. 720).

The type of death she chooses also alludes to the specific circumstances of her emotional trauma. She unpins her *peplos* on the bed and stabs herself in the side: ὀρῶμεν αὐτὴν ἀμφιπλήγι φασγάνῳ / πλευρὰν ὑφ’ ἥπαρ καὶ φρένας πεπληγμένην (“We see her struck with a two-edged sword in the side, below the liver and the midriff,” 930-931). Deianeira’s act of undressing on the bed and her choice to stab her side, an unusual manner of suicide for a woman,³⁵⁰ recalls the sexual penetration that Nessus attempted in the river. Moreover, the language of striking, repeated in the adjective ἀμφιπλήγι and in the participle πεπληγμένην,

³⁴⁸ For another farewell to a marriage bed before death, cf. Eur. *Alc.* 177-182. In this play, the farewell calls attention to Alcestis’ fidelity.

³⁴⁹ Easterling (1982) *ad* 920-922 remarks, “Direct speech quoted within a long narrative normally marks moments of dramatic importance.”

³⁵⁰ On types of suicide for women in tragedy, see Loraux (1987) 14.

brings to mind the language used to describe Deianeira's emotional shock: ἐκπεπληγμένη φόβῳ (24), her shocked reaction to the contest between Achelous and Heracles, and λόγοις / τοῖς νῦν παροῦσιν ἐκπεπληγμένη (385-386), her shocked reaction to the news about Iole's true identity. This final, literal stroke of the sword reveals the sources of her emotional pain: her marriage to Heracles, her sexual assault by Nessus, and the sad fate of Iole, destined to be Deianeira's rival rather than her ally because of Heracles' lust.

The place where Deianeira plunges her sword – beneath the liver – reinforces the idea that her physical wound evokes her emotional wounds. The phrase “a blow to the liver” is a metaphor used often in tragedy to describe the violence of an emotion.³⁵¹ In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, for example, the Chorus uses a variation of the expression to describe their emotional pain at the loss of young men in the Trojan War:

πολλὰ γοῦν θιγγάνει πρὸς ἥπαρ·
οὐς μὲν γάρ <τις> ἔπεμψεν
οἶδεν, ἀντὶ δὲ φωτῶν
τεύχη καὶ σποδὸς εἰς ἐκά-
στου δόμους ἀφικνεῖται. (432-436)

Many things, at any rate, touch the liver:
For each person knows the men
whom one sent off, but instead of men
urns and ashes return
to each man's home.

Deianeira's decision to stab herself beneath the liver locates her physical wound where her emotional wound, in Greek idiom, would be.

Nicole Loraux (1987), in an essay on women's deaths in tragedy, discusses the military language that accompanies Deianeira's suicide, and the reversal of gender roles, as Deianeira

³⁵¹ Cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 432, 792, *Cho.* 272, *Eum.* 135, 158; Soph. *Aj.* 938; Eur. *Supp.* 599, *Hipp.* 1070. See Loraux (1987) 54.

dies a soldier's death by the sword, while Heracles is made effeminate by his slow death by poison.³⁵² Rather than interpret Deianeira's death by the sword as her choice to "play the man in death,"³⁵³ as Loraux does, I propose that the two opposed deaths of husband and wife, in their reversal of the usual gender categories, emphasize how similar their experiences as survivors of trauma are, despite the differences in the traumatic events themselves.³⁵⁴ Furthermore, the manner of their deaths shows that their past experiences of trauma affect not only themselves, but each other in profound ways – the centaur's charm, which was the result of Deianeira's sexual assault, kills Heracles, while Heracles' neglect during his labors and related military campaigns, symbolized by the sword, kills Deianeira. Deianeira has expressed throughout the play the pain that Heracles' constant absences have caused her; her death by the sword also eloquently captures the disastrous effects that Heracles' battle-seeking life has had upon her.

When Hyllus discovers what has happened to his mother, he regrets his haste in condemning her and blames himself for her suicide:

ιδὼν δ' ὁ παῖς ὤμωξεν· ἔγνω γὰρ τάλας
 τοῦργον κατ' ὀργὴν ὡς ἐφάψειεν τόδε,
 ὅψ' ἐκδιδαχθεῖς τῶν κατ' οἶκον οὕνεκα
 ἄκουσα πρὸς τοῦ θηρὸς ἔρξειεν τάδε. (932-935)

Her son cried out when he saw her. For he, wretched boy, recognized
 that he had brought this deed about in his anger,

³⁵² Heracles claims that he "weeps like a girl" (ὥστε παρθένος / βέβρουχα κλαίων, 1071-1072) and that his pain has turned him into a "wretched female" (θῆλυς...τάλας, 1075). On this reversal of gender roles in death, see Loraux (1987) 13-14, Zeitlin (1996b) 363, and Cawthorn (2008) 79-97. Seaford (1986) 56-67, Pozzi (1994) 583-584, Segal (1995) 72, 75, 91, and Ormand (1999) 36 note that the end of the *Trachiniae* contains a "parody of wedding rituals in which Heracles is a bride" (in Ormand's words).

³⁵³ Loraux (1987) 17.

³⁵⁴ On the similarity between the psychological effects of trauma on survivors of rape and survivors of combat, see Herman (1992) 32: "Only after 1980, when the efforts of combat veterans had legitimated the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder, did it become clear that the psychological syndrome seen in survivors of rape, domestic battery, and incest was essentially the same as the syndrome seen in survivors of war."

having learned too late from those at home that
she did these things unwillingly, under the influence of the beast.

Deianeira's past trauma, revealed to Hyllus by women in the house, is important for Hyllus' understanding of Deianeira's innocence (ἄκουσα, 935). Hyllus' lesson, which forms part of his coming-of-age and leads to his acceptance of the role of mediator, is marked by the Nurse's comment that he "learned too late" (ὄψ' ἐκδιδαχθεῖς, 934). The theme of late-learning links Hyllus' recognition (ἔγνω, 932) here with Deianeira's earlier recognition of her disastrous deed.³⁵⁵ After he hears the whole story, he no longer blames Deianeira; instead, he blames himself for condemning her before knowing everything. He embraces his dying mother and groans "that he had cast evil blame upon her rashly" (ὡς νιν ματαίως αἰτία βάλαι κακῆ, 940). The rashness (ματαίως, 940) of Hyllus' condemnation echoes the language used to describe the rash hands of the centaur (ματαίαις χερσίν, 565) and Deianeira's rash decision to send the charm (πράσσειν μάταιον, 587). The centaur's sexual violence results in further rash decisions, rebounding from generation to generation as trauma experienced in the past is relived to disastrous effect in the present.

Heracles' sickness

Though my focus in this chapter has been Deianeira's experiences of trauma and how they disastrously affect her reception of Heracles as he returns home from combat, I want to consider briefly the depiction of Heracles' sickness in the last scene of the play in order to show that Heracles' sufferings mirror Deianeira's in certain respects, though Heracles is unaware of this similarity. Hyllus functions as mediator between his dead mother and his dying father,

³⁵⁵ Roselli (1982) 26 adds that Hyllus' late-learning reverses the optimistic notes of his first appearance in the drama. On the theme of late-learning, see Whitman (1951) 103-121, Lawrence (1978), Scodel (1984) 27-42, and Levett (2004) 92-102, among many others.

testifying to Deianeira’s trauma in order to achieve some belated mutual understanding between her and his father. Heracles, however, is so absorbed in his own pain that he refuses to consider Deianeira’s position, turning instead to the patrilineal connection between himself, Zeus, and Hyllus. The irony, and indeed tragedy, of this ending is that Heracles’ sufferings are intertwined with Deianeira’s, and yet he stubbornly refuses to acknowledge any connection with his wife’s sufferings. In part, such a refusal can be attributed to Heracles’ pain, which totally absorbs him in himself,³⁵⁶ but this refusal also corresponds to Heracles’ neglect of Deianeira as demonstrated throughout the play in her stories about the past, and shows Heracles’ preoccupation with topics external to his domestic life, such as living up to his status as the heroic warrior son of Zeus, and passing on this legacy to his son.³⁵⁷

Heracles describes the onslaught of his sickness as if he is being attacked by a wild animal: ἥπταί μου, τοτοτοῖ, ἄδ’ ἀνθ’ ἔρπει (“it has hold of me, tototoi, it creeps up on me again,” 1010); θρώσκει δ’ ἀνθ’, θρώσκει δειλαία / διολοῦσ’ ἡμᾶς / ἀποτίβατος ἀγρία νόσος (“it leaps up again, the wretched disease leaps up, destroying me, the unapproachable wild disease,” 1027-1030).³⁵⁸ Though he does not know it, he is in a sense being attacked by a beast, by Nessus through his poisoned blood. Deianeira and the Chorus repeatedly refer to Nessus as a

³⁵⁶ See Biggs (1966) 228: “Intense pain turns all the sufferer’s concentration inward (and thereby, of course, intensifies itself). Thus Heracles can refuse to understand Hyllus’ vindication of Deianeira, and justify the refusal by his disease (1120f.)”

³⁵⁷ On the “divided worlds of Deianeira and Heracles,” gendered and irreconcilable, see Kitzinger (2012). On Heracles’ view of his marriage with Deianeira as a relationship with other men, see Ormand (1999) 37: “Heracles views his wedding to Deianeira as he views virtually every other aspect of his life: as a relationship, whether antagonistic or friendly, with other men. It is an expression of male homosocial desire.”

³⁵⁸ Cf. also 1053-1057. For a discussion of Heracles’ symptoms in light of contemporary medical treatises on disease, see Ceschi (2009). See Nooter (2012a) 211 on Heracles as a poetic speaker who employs personification in his description of the disease.

beast in the play (ὁ θήρ, cf. 556, 568, 662, 680, 707, 935). The language used to describe Heracles' sickness reinforces the connection between the past assault on Deianeira by the centaur and the present assault on Heracles.

In other ways Heracles' speeches parallel Deianeira's speeches in the first half of the play.³⁵⁹ Heracles introduces the story of his life with a priamel representing the present sickness as the worst of all the many painful labors he has suffered:

ὦ πολλὰ δὴ καὶ θερμά, καὶ λόγῳ κακά,
καὶ χερσὶ καὶ νώτοισι μοχθήσας ἐγώ·
κούπω τοιοῦτον οὔτ' ἄκοιτις ἢ Διὸς
προὔθηκεν οὔθ' ὁ στυγνὸς Εὐρυσθεὺς ἐμοὶ
οἶον τόδ' ἢ δολῶπις Οἰνέως κόρη
καθήψεν ὤμοις τοῖς ἐμοῖς Ἐρινύων
ὑφαντὸν ἀμφίβληστρον, ᾧ διόλλυμαι. (1046-1052)

Many indeed, hot, and evil to relate are the things
I have suffered with my hands and my back,
and not yet has either the wife of Zeus
or hateful Eurystheus beset me with such a thing
as this, which the wily daughter of Oineus
fixed upon my shoulders, the woven net
of the Erinyes, by which I am destroyed.

This pronouncement recalls Deianeira's opening monologue, in which she provides proof of her miserable life by describing her "toils" (πόνον, 30), culminating in her present situation, Heracles' most recent absence. Furthermore, the aspect of the sickness that most infuriates Heracles is that it makes him helpless, causing him to lose control and weep, like a woman: *vūv δ' ἐκ τοιούτου θήλυσ ἠΰρημαι τάλας* ("But now, because of this, I have been found to be a wretched woman," 1075). Though Heracles' disease makes him feel very much like Deianeira,

³⁵⁹ This parallel would, perhaps, be intensified by the fact that the same actor played both parts. See Hicks (1992) for a discussion of the effect on an audience of watching the male actor who played Deianeira transform into Heracles at the end of the play. See also Ringer (1998) 51-66.

alone, helpless, and wounded, emotionally and physically, he blames her for bringing this sickness upon him, unaware of her similar experiences. When Heracles exclaims, “May I see her fall in the same way, the very same way, as she destroyed me” (τὰν ὧδ’ ἐπίδοιμι πεσοῦσαν / αὐτῶς, ὧδ’ αὐτῶς, ὥς μ’ ὤλεσεν, 1039-1040), he does not realize that he has already seen her fall in the same way, that his own death is the belated consequence of this previous “downfall,” Deianeira’s assault by Nessus. The external audience and Hyllus can note this similarity, even when Heracles can not.

Heracles instead views himself as utterly alone in his suffering, as he has been alone in his labors, ridding Greece of terrible pests. He blames the Greeks for abandoning him in his sickness after he has done so much good for them:

πόθεν ἔστ’, ὦ
Ἕλληνας πάντων ἀδικώτατοι ἄνδρες, οἷς δὴ
πολλὰ μὲν ἐν πόντῳ, κατὰ τε θρῆα πάντα καθαίρων
ὠλεκόμαν ὁ τάλας, καὶ νῦν ἐπὶ τῷδε νοσοῦντι
οὐ πῦρ, οὐκ ἔγχος τις ὀνήσιμον οὐ ποτε τρέψει; (1010-1014)

Where are you from,
Greeks, most unjust men of all, for whom indeed
I was miserably destroyed, ridding you of many things in the sea,
and many in all the forests, and now in my sickness
not fire, nor aiding spear will anyone ever offer?

As Deianeira was, Heracles is also isolated in Trachis; none of the Greeks he helped in his labors offer their support, and his mother and children have gone elsewhere in search of a home (1150-1154). The only person remaining at Heracles’ side at the end of the play is Hyllus, whom Heracles attempts to ally with him in rejection of his mother: ὦ παῖ, γενοῦ μοι παῖς ἐτήτυμος γεγώς, / καὶ μὴ τὸ μητρὸς ὄνομα προεσβεύσης πλέον (“O child, become my true-born son,

and do not revere your mother's name more," 1064-1065).³⁶⁰ He requests that Hyllus bring out Deianeira so that he can test whether Hyllus suffers more when he sees his father's tortured body or his mother's justly mistreated (1066-1069). Heracles asks Hyllus to take sides because he is more interested in passing on his legacy to his "true-born son," than in understanding Deianeira's point of view.

Hyllus, however, attempts to make Heracles see Deianeira's perspective, though Heracles has so vehemently rejected any mention of her. Hyllus strives to convey the information that had been missing when he also had condemned Deianeira too rashly, that she had poisoned Heracles by accident (οὐχ ἔκουσία, 1123). Heracles refuses to understand the "complexities" (ποικίλλεις, 1121) that Hyllus introduces into his judgment of Deianeira, but Hyllus persists, convinced that "her situation is such that it is not fitting to silence it" (ἔχει γὰρ οὕτως ὅστε μὴ σιγᾶν πρόπειν, 1126). Hyllus bears witness for Deianeira, resisting the silence that threatens to overwhelm victims of trauma. As the recipient of Deianeira's story, and the eyewitness to her violent suicide, Hyllus has been directly affected, traumatized even, by his mother's experiences of trauma. His relation to his father is troubled by this newfound understanding of his mother's side of the story. Indeed, Heracles tries to make Hyllus forget his mother's story, to silence the memories of her trauma that so complicate the picture of his death as accomplished by an evil woman. Hyllus' attempt to rectify Heracles' judgment succeeds only when he names a male agent behind Deianeira's actions, the centaur Nessus (1141). Suddenly Heracles can make sense

³⁶⁰ See Pozzi (1999) 35 on Hyllus' struggles with his father as part of his coming-of-age: "In the encounter of father and son and what we might call their mutual recognition, Hyllus seems alternatively propelled by two contrary drives: an impulse to lose himself in the identification with his father and one to pull away from him so as to affirm his own identity."

of his death as perpetrated by a man, not a woman, and as prophesied by his father, Zeus (1157-1178).

Though Hyllus assumes the role of witness for Deianeira after her death, by the end of the play he is forced to concede to his father's will, a concession most evident in his agreement to take Iole as his bride.³⁶¹ Heracles wants no other man but his son to have his war-prize, but Hyllus balks, since this is the woman who (unwillingly) caused his mother's death and his father's present sufferings:

τίς γάρ ποθ', ἢ μοι μητρὶ μὲν θανεῖν μόνη
μεταίτιος, σοὶ δ' αὐθις ὡς ἔχεις ἔχειν,
τίς ταῦτ' ἄν, ὅστις μὴ ἔξ ἀλαστόρων νοσοῖ,
ἔλοιτο; κρείσσον κάμει γ', ὦ πάτερ, θανεῖν
ἢ τοῖσιν ἐχθίστοισι συνναίειν ὁμοῦ. (1233-1237)

For who in the world would choose this woman, who alone was the cause of my mother's death and, in turn, responsible for how you are in this state, who would choose these things, who was not sick from avenging gods? It is better for me too, father, to die than to live together with my worst enemies.

In his initial reaction to Heracles' request, Hyllus indicates his loyalty to his mother and his father, against Iole, whom he blames, with less sympathy than Deianeira had, for the destruction of both parents. Yet Heracles insists, and his victory in this *agon* with his son provides proof that Hyllus is on his side, his legitimate son, who will inherit his property after his death. Like

³⁶¹ MacKinnon (1971) 41 argues that the language of the passage indicates that Iole will be Hyllus' concubine, not his legitimate wife: "This is surely the speech not of a lover, but of a typical heroic warrior who regards the preservation of his property [...] as an integral and necessary component of his honourable status, and who sees his son to be, in this matter, an extension of himself." He does not address the tradition of the Heracleidae, children of Hyllus and Iole, as Heracles' legitimate descendants. Rabinowitz (2014) 195 points to Iole's disturbing silence, especially in this final scene: "As little agency as Deianeira had, she at least was given voice. Iole is to the end an object, handed around by men. Her new role as wife cannot obliterate her past as a slave taken in the conquest of her city and her people."

Heracles' earlier request to bring out Deianeira's body, this request is a test of Hyllus' loyalties. After Hyllus concedes to Heracles' request, Deianeira is not mentioned again in the play.

In the last 300 lines of the play, after his belated entrance, Heracles discovers that his suffering and death are linked to something greater: the will of Zeus, who prophesied his death at the hands of a dead man.³⁶² He also succeeds in enlisting his son as an ally (σύμμαχον, 1175), who will carry out his will after his death, as he carried out Zeus', however painful and difficult.³⁶³ Yet Deianeira's death fades out of memory as it is replaced by this vision of patrilineal succession. To what greater purpose is Deianeira's death linked? The ending of the play, with its cryptic pronouncement, "there is nothing here that is not Zeus" (καὸὐδὲν τούτων ὅτι μὴ Ζεὺς, 1278), perhaps suggests that Deianeira's death is also linked to Zeus' will. But this pronouncement is so closely linked with Heracles' grand finale, his drawing of the patrilineal line between Zeus, himself, and Hyllus, and his silencing of Deianeira, that the feminine side, the drama of Deianeira's suffering, which dominated the first 975 lines of the play, runs the risk of being forgotten.³⁶⁴

Conclusion

In the *Trachiniae*, Sophocles carefully articulates Deianeira's past history of trauma and its continuing effects in the present. Deianeira's efforts to be a good wife are undermined by her

³⁶² Scholars are divided as to whether the ending of the *Trachiniae* alludes to the story of Heracles' apotheosis from the pyre, or whether the omission of any direct reference to apotheosis means that we should have in mind only Heracles' painful death. Holt (1989) succinctly states the problem and various scholarly positions. He is in favor of apotheosis. For extensive bibliography on this question, see Holt (1989) 69 n. 1 and Liapis (2006) 56 n. 23 and n. 24.

³⁶³ See OKell (2011) 222-224 on this final, oral will and its relationship with the earlier will delivered to Deianeira.

³⁶⁴ Indeed, some critics privilege the ending as more important than Deianeira's story for interpretation of the play. See, for example, Doerries (2015) 211-258, who links the play with the difficult decisions people make in providing end-of-life care. In this telling, Deianeira's sufferings are completely elided.

lack of a supportive community and the difficulty of understanding the power that trauma continues to exercise over decision-making even decades after the traumatic event. Though there is pressure to silence and forget the stories of victims, especially those of devalued members of society, such as women and children,³⁶⁵ remembering these stories is crucial for understanding the whole story, for constructing one play out of the two halves acted first by Deianeira and then by Heracles. Heracles never reaches his home, and Deianeira never welcomes him back: the two never meet onstage. The couple's failure to communicate about the emotional damage caused by the violence of war and Heracles' infidelity results in both characters' deaths. This failure, symbolized by the play's structural separation of the two main characters, exemplifies the emotional rift that physical distance and violence can create between returning veteran and wife.

Such a rift and its harmful consequences may well have been familiar to many members of the ancient audience, including veterans, wives of veterans, and their children. At the same time, the play hints at a realization that could help mend this rift by showing that the past and present traumas of wife and veteran are inextricably interwoven. Despite their irreconcilable distance, these two halves and their experiences of trauma in fact resemble each other. As I argued in Chapter 2, Penelope and Odysseus in the *Odyssey* also share aspects of their experience apart, and employ similar strategies to navigate the obstacles they face. While the *Agamemnon* subverts their close relationship by pitting wife against husband because of her resentment about the war, the *Trachiniae* explores another way in which war violence and sexual trauma can prevent wife and veteran from overcoming the distance between them.

³⁶⁵ See Herman (1992) 8: "When the victim is already devalued (a woman, a child), she may find that the most traumatic events of her life take place outside the realm of socially validated reality. Her experience becomes unspeakable."

CHAPTER 5

A Penelope Undone:

Megara in Euripides' *Heracles*

“They fought for others to have peace.....only to return home to NEVER have peace within themselves or their families again.” — Carrie, wife of a Vietnam veteran³⁶⁶

This statement by the wife of a Vietnam veteran diagnosed with PTSD eloquently captures the tragic reversal of Euripides' *Heracles*, which features Heracles returning from defending the civilized world from evil,³⁶⁷ and then murdering his own family in a fit of divinely inspired madness. The long ellipsis (.....) in Carrie's sentence achieves an effect similar to the “broken-backed” structure of the play,³⁶⁸ dramatizing the ironic disjunction between the soldier's achievement of peace for others and his simultaneous loss of peace for himself and his family.³⁶⁹

Euripides' *Heracles* contains two separate, but related dramas, marked by the appearance of Lyssa and Iris on the *mechane*.³⁷⁰ The suppliant drama, in which Heracles' family confronts

³⁶⁶ Finley (2013).

³⁶⁷ “The taming of the earth” (ἐξημερώσαι γαῖαν, 20), as Heracles' mortal father Amphitryon puts it.

³⁶⁸ Murray (1946) 112.

³⁶⁹ This disjunction can also be seen in *Agamemnon*, as discussed in Chapter 3: Agamemnon wins the just war abroad, but sacrifices his own family in order to achieve it.

³⁷⁰ For the use of stagecraft to mark a new beginning midway through this play, see Halleran (1985) 88: “The gods in Euripides, except for the special case of the ‘mortal’ Dionysus in *Bakch.*, appear only in the prologues, where they never interact with mortal characters, and at the end of the dramas.” The appearance of Lyssa and Iris in the middle of the play, therefore, flags a new beginning. Dunn (1996) 128 argues that “[t]he plot is not a single and coherent action, but a sequence of episodes leading to a series of aborted ends.”

death at the hands of a tyrant, introduces several themes as “misdirections” that prepare the audience for events that never happen or that take place differently than expected in the second half of the play.³⁷¹ These themes depict Heracles’ family in crisis and hinge upon the experiences of his wife, Megara, especially in her role as mother of their three small children. The narrative technique of misdirection places the audience in Megara’s position – like her, viewers and readers could not anticipate the horrifying reversal of fortune that follows Heracles’ return.³⁷² Although Megara’s situation – as daughter of the Theban king, whose family is threatened by a usurping tyrant – is more extreme than that of Athenian soldiers’ wives, her speeches dramatize concerns about preserving the family’s noble reputation, the absence of *philia* and social isolation, and the difficulties of raising sons without their father that would have been relevant and recognizable issues for women in fifth-century Athens.

Unlike Clytemnestra and Deianeira, Megara welcomes her husband when he returns and tries to facilitate his reintegration into their home and family. She approximates Penelope in her noble defense of her family and home, an analogy that I will draw at greater length in this chapter in order to argue that Euripides stages a dark ending to Penelope’s story in the *Odyssey*, when her husband returns and, rather than rescue his family with his bow, destroys them with it. Euripides’ dark revision of the veteran’s homecoming in the *Odyssey* calls attention to the

³⁷¹ On misdirection (or false prolepsis) in narrative, see de Jong (2014) 85. See also Morrison (1992) on misdirection in Homer’s *Iliad* and Goward (1999) 122-125 on prolepsis and the importance of chance in Euripides’ narratives.

³⁷² See Morrison (1992) 8 on the effect of misdirection on the audience of the *Iliad*: “If the poet withholds crucial information or actively misleads, the audience is brought to the realization that its own perspective on the story can be nearly as limited as that of any character within the story [...] This affinity with mortal characters – rather than with the narrator or the omniscient gods – produces on the part of the audience more sympathy for those characters.” Though tragedy lacks a narrator, a similar effect is produced by secondary narrators (e.g. prologue speakers, messengers, the chorus). On the application of narratology to drama, see de Jong (2014) 197-198.

potentially traumatic effects of war on the veteran and his family in the middle of a long and grueling war during which, as Thucydides charts in his *History*, Athenian leaders began to violate or dismiss notions of morality and justice.³⁷³

Although no date for the *Heracles* has been preserved, metrical evidence points to a date close to 416 or 414 BC.³⁷⁴ If either of these dates is correct, the play was performed at the peak of Athenian lust for battle; in the winter of 415 BC, the Athenians conquered Melos, killed all of the men who could bear arms, and enslaved the women and children. They also began to prepare their ill-fated expedition against Sicily. The siege of Syracuse was in full, disastrous swing by 414. At the same time that Athens was preparing for more combat, Euripides was producing plays depicting the violent costs of these wars. In *Trojan Women*, which was produced in 415, Euripides depicted in detail the anxieties and emotions of women enslaved by a conquering army, a chilling perspective to showcase on the Athenian stage just after the conquest of Melos.³⁷⁵

Heracles turns the focus upon the family of a famous veteran, Heracles, and its violent destruction at his hands. Athens figures prominently in the resolution of this play, as the city, through Theseus, offers Heracles purification, honor, and recuperation, which he cannot find in his hometown of Thebes. Although the play does not criticize Athenian policy in any direct way, it dramatizes the devastating consequences that battle lust (embodied by Lyssa, as I will argue) can have when transposed, even unwillingly, upon the home. Megara and her children are the

³⁷³ For the tendency of Athenian speakers in the *History* to dismiss questions of justice, see Heath (1990), who, however, argues that Athenians were not as dismissive of moral arguments as is indicated by their speeches in Thucydides.

³⁷⁴ For a discussion of the date of the play, see Bond (1981) xxx-xxxii.

³⁷⁵ The connection between *Trojan Women* and Melos goes back to Murray (1913). Scodel (1980) and Kip (1987) question the chronology.

collateral damage of Heracles' war trauma, which Euripides puts on stage just as Athens was anticipating another cycle of deployment and return, this time to a vast island far away, about which little was actually known.

In addition, while there is little direct evidence for domestic violence in ancient Greece, the *Heracles* offers one of the only surviving literary depictions of such violence.³⁷⁶ As tragedy is performed by and for combat veterans,³⁷⁷ and also for their wives and families, it is perhaps no surprise that this depiction centers upon a combat veteran's violence brought home. Although it rarely makes headlines, veteran domestic violence is a prominent concern for contemporary American wives of veterans who suffer from PTSD and TBI. In an op-ed piece for the *San Francisco Gate*, Stacy Bannerman (2014), wife of an Iraq war veteran, writes, "There have been days when there are more military family members killed by their veteran on the home front than troops killed in action on the war front. March 23, 2012, was one of them." She goes on to describe the murder of Kristy Huddleston by her husband, a combat veteran who had served multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and was traumatized by his war experiences. He shot his wife in the head. Their 10-year-old son called 911.

According to a Yale study from 2002, combat veterans commit 21% of current spouse or partner abuse.³⁷⁸ Combat veterans who are diagnosed with PTSD are more likely than others to

³⁷⁶ On the relative silence of ancient sources on domestic violence in ancient Greece, see Goff (2004) 136 n. 169, and in ancient Rome, see Treggiari (1991) 430. On the representation of domestic violence in Greek literature, see Schaps (2006), Llewelyn-Jones (2011), and Deacy and McHardy (2013). On the evidence from Christian Africa for physical abuse of wives, see Clark (1998). The difficulty of documenting this behavior in pagan Greece and Rome does not prove an absence of such behavior. On the tragedians' preference for staging female acts of aggression and violence over male acts of aggression and violence, see Keuls (1993) 338-339.

³⁷⁷ For combat veterans in the audience of Greek tragedy, see Shay (1995) and (2002) 152-153, Meineck (2012), and the discussion in the Introduction (Chapter 1).

³⁷⁸ The Trauma Foundation (2002).

commit violence against intimate partners: “over 80 percent [committed] at least one act of violence in the previous year, and almost half at least one severe act, including strangulation, stabbing and shooting.”³⁷⁹ These statistics are, however, out of date, and may even be higher, as the rate of domestic violence among combat veteran communities is on the rise, while the rate nationwide is decreasing.³⁸⁰ Veterans also account for 20% of all suicides in the U.S.³⁸¹ Yet while suicide among veterans has been called an epidemic, in Bannerman’s (2014) words, “we don’t talk about veteran intimate partner violence at all, effectively ensuring that the catastrophic consequences remain largely unacknowledged and unaddressed.”

Moreover, recent research suggests that domestic violence committed by veterans differs from the cycle of violence and controlling behavior typical of civilian domestic violence.³⁸² Unlike civilian domestic violence or “coercive control,” veteran domestic violence often occurs without other attempts to assert control over one’s partner, financially, socially, or otherwise, making her a hostage in her own home. Bannerman (2014) writes of veteran domestic violence that “it is an explosion of violence, rather than an escalation; there is typically no ‘honeymoon’ period after the event, as the veteran withdraws in shame; and the violence is more likely to be lethal or potentially lethal in severity.” Heracles’ violence in Euripides’ play fits this model of veteran domestic violence very closely.

In this chapter I argue that Euripides’ *Heracles* dramatizes two crises that veterans and

³⁷⁹ Bannerman (2014).

³⁸⁰ Bannerman (2010), Zoroya (2010).

³⁸¹ This statistic has been widely circulated in the media. See, for example, Face the Facts USA (2013). On murder-suicides by veterans, see The Associated Press (2002), Orth (2002), Sontag and Alvarez (2008), Kulbarsh (2012), The Military Suicide Report (2012), Neiwert (2015), Reavy (2015), and WSBTV (2015).

³⁸² On civilian domestic violence and “coercive control,” see, for example, Stark (2007) 5.

their family members sometimes face after the veteran's return home: first, unexpected, explosive violence committed by the veteran against family members, especially wife and children, and second, the strong desire for suicide prompted by feelings of shame as a result of this violence. Although the second half of the play focuses on Heracles' rejection of suicide and the beginning of his recuperation through bonds of *philia* with Theseus and Athens, the first, often neglected half focuses on the nobility and courage of the family members who become casualties of Heracles' madness. While the relevance of this play to modern veteran communities, particularly in relation to the veteran's madness, shame, and contemplation of suicide, has been recognized by groups like Aquila Theatre,³⁸³ more attention should be paid to the experiences of Megara, the wife who, despite her best efforts to protect her family, is suddenly erased by the war violence brought home by her veteran husband.

Perceptions of Megara and the "suppliant drama"

Despite her prominent role in the first half of the play, Megara's character has also received little attention from scholars, who diminish the importance of her role, pass over it in silence, or judge her actions and views harshly. Few offer extended analyses of her speeches. Because of long-standing complaints about the play's structural disunity, the so-called "suppliant drama," in which Megara makes her long speeches, has suffered in comparison with the rest of

³⁸³ On March 27, 2013, Aquila Theatre performed a translation of Euripides' *Heracles* that replaced the ancient chorus with video clips of veterans describing their experiences of combat. Zinoman (2013) writes, "Herakles' descent into unthinkable violence is juxtaposed with veterans' stories of violent images they can't shake. But even such echoes can come off as too neat and literal, taking mythic tragedy and transforming it into a drama about post-traumatic stress disorder." Although women who had experienced combat were featured in the videos, no wives or other family members who had experienced domestic violence were interviewed. Meagher's (2006) translation of Euripides' *Heracles* similarly focuses on Heracles the veteran and survivor, rather than on his family. Riley (2008) 338-357 discusses other modern versions of the play, including Algie's *Home Front*, which casts Heracles as a Vietnam veteran named Harrison. Meg, Harrison's wife, is neurotic, deluded, and neglects her children, in sharp contrast to Euripides' Megara.

the play. William Arrowsmith (1956, 48) calls the action of this first part “leached of any really tragic movement,” while Victor Ehrenberg (1946, 158) complains of “stale and boring rhetoric.”

In attempting to provide a reason for the perceived disunity, others view the first part of the play as foil for the second part. W. Geoffrey Arnott (1978, 14) argues that the incompetence of the first part is “Euripides’ mightiest red herring,” lulling the audience into complacency before the shock of its reversal. Ann Norris Michelini (1987, 232-233), who expands upon Arnott’s red herring theory, argues that the “events of the second half render the events of the first irrelevant and without meaning...we are misled by an elaborate false front or dummy play, from which the real dramatic action emerges startlingly, like a jack from its box.” These readings privilege Heracles’ madness and recovery, “the real dramatic action,” over Heracles’ family’s deliberations and their confrontation with death, the “dummy play.” Michelini (1987, 247) claims, for instance, that Megara is merely a “surrogate for the absent Herakles.”

Anne Pippin Burnett (1971) offers the most extended, and most negative, reading of Megara’s role in the play. Basing her analysis on her interpretation of Aristotelian *hamartia*, she argues that Megara’s aberrant supplication and “arrogant agnosticism” warrant the violent death that she receives at her husband’s hands.³⁸⁴ This view attempts to provide an ethical, causal link between the action of the first part of the play and the unexpected reversal,³⁸⁵ when in fact the power of the play resides in the absence of a causal link between these two parts – despite his

³⁸⁴ Burnett (1971) 163.

³⁸⁵ Burnett (1971) 158-159: “When the opening scenes of the *Heracles* are compared to their natural foils in other suppliant dramas, aberrations and distortions appear that are easily a match for those of the second half of the play. In fact, the two halves of the play, equally defiant of the conventional forms, prove to have positive ethical links that establish something very like a causal sequence between them. Megara’s suppliant drama is an action purposely malformed so that it can lead directly into the grotesque scenes that destroy her.”

and his family's best efforts, Heracles' madness destroys them. Indeed, few have accepted that Megara's supplication is as mistaken as Burnett claims, and her reading does not account for the role of the children or of Lyssa in the play.

The structural disunity of *Heracles* prompts others to look for thematic links between the two halves of the play. These readings also privilege the views expressed by the play's male characters over views expressed by Megara by claiming that the second half of the play corrects Megara's mistaken views of *philia* or of *arete*.³⁸⁶ While less damning of Megara than Burnett's reading, these claims, like Arnott's red herring theory, present Megara's speeches in the suppliant drama as foil against which the working out of new ideas about core Greek values takes place.³⁸⁷ Following Arthur W. H. Adkins (1966), however, I argue that these values are largely consistent across both halves of the play, but that Heracles' madness devastatingly eliminates his family as a source of support so that he must define his future not in terms of this lost family, but in terms of his friendship with a fellow veteran and an alliance with Athens.

Other views of Megara, presented largely in passing, claim that, in choosing to accept death, she misunderstands or underestimates her husband. Justina Gregory (1991, 126), for example, states that "a combination of pride and fatalism blind her to the truly exceptional

³⁸⁶ For the second half as a correction of Megara's views of friendship, see Sheppard (1916) and Kraus (1999). For Heracles' redefinition of *arete*, see Chalk (1962) 7-18, de Romilly (2003, orig. 1980) 291-294, Barlow (1981) 119-120, Higgins (1984) 104-105, Furley (1986), Fitzgerald (1991) 93-95, Cerri (1997), and Assaël (2001) 178-186. See also Walsh (1979) 305: "[Megara's] inability to act against her enemies forces her to choose a kind of honor that violates personal ties, and so she fails through weakness to reconcile public and private roles. Heracles is paired with Megara by contrast, and his approach to the conflict between public and private roles, completed at the end of the play, balances and corrects hers at the beginning."

³⁸⁷ Scholars also contrast Megara's preference for an honorable death with Heracles' rejection of suicide; see, for example, Garrison (1995) 76: "Earlier Megara also had acknowledged the weight of necessity but persisted in that aspect of *aretê* that prescribes death, even death by suicide, over dishonor [...] Euripides seemingly has articulated a new code, one in which moral relativity and human friendship prevail and succeed in supplanting older traditional notions."

capabilities of her husband.” Likewise, Robert Meagher (2006, 139) claims that Megara misunderstands Heracles: “It is clear from these words that Megara does not know her husband very well, not only who he will become but also who he is.” Although these scholars do not provide extended analysis of Megara’s speeches or actions in the first part of the play, they readily dismiss her character as naive and flawed.

This scholarly lack of appreciation for Megara’s role mirrors lack of appreciation for the efforts and struggles of wives on the home front. In addition, Megara is not the typical “disruptive” Euripidean heroine, who stands out for readers or viewers because of misbehavior, flouting of rules, or challenges to male authority.³⁸⁸ The threat to the household in her husband’s absence does not arise from her, whether purposely, as in *Agamemnon*, or by accident, as in *Trachiniae*; in this play Euripides chooses not to explore female disruption of the male order, but rather female integrity despite disruption of the male order. In a way, this choice makes the play all the more radical, since it depicts the vulnerability of the family even when protected by an impeccable female caregiver, a kind of white rhinoceros in Greek tragedy. The threat to the family comes from another man, Lycus, and, even more shockingly, from the male head of household himself, Heracles.

Megara is not presented as an ineffective or blameworthy wife or mother; her husband’s absence results in a fatal threat to her household, which she attempts to convert into a testament to the family’s nobility and self-sacrifice. In order to emphasize Megara’s integrity, there is no hint of a threat to her chastity, unlike in most other Greek and Roman narratives about a faithful wife (e.g. the *Odyssey*, Euripides’ *Helen*, Seneca’s *Hercules Furens*). She is instead presented as

³⁸⁸ Hall (1997) 106 notes this pattern in Euripides’ plots: “there is undeniably a tendency towards plots with disruptive women.” She notes Megara as an exception to this tendency.

a positive example of motherhood in direct opposition to Hera, the vicious stepmother.³⁸⁹ When Heracles turns against their children, she attempts to protect them from his arrows. That she cannot in the end save her family from this pitiful death is not her failing, but her tragedy: as Heracles recognizes, his madness results in the senseless killing of a noble wife and mother, along with their noble children. He notes well the discrepancy between her actions and his own when he addresses her for the last time:

σέ τ' οὐχ ὁμοίως, ὦ τάλαιν', ἀπώλεσα
ὥσπερ σὺ τὰ μὰ λέκτρ' ἔσωζες ἀσφαλῶς,
μακρὰς διαντλοῦσ' ἐν δόμοις οἰκουρίας.³⁹⁰ (1371-1373)

And I destroyed you, wretched one, in a manner quite out of keeping
with how you preserved my bed faithfully,
enduring to the end the long hours of housekeeping.

The active verb, ἔσωζες (1372), attributes to her, more than to Heracles, the heroic preservation of their household and family.

This chapter first argues that Megara is a Penelope figure who attempts to preserve her household and her family in the face of a serious threat. Several themes emerge as challenges for the heroic waiting wife, which elaborate upon themes addressed in Chapter 2: the wife's imitation of her absent husband and her concern for the family's nobility, the absence of social support and the negative consequences of social isolation, the difficulties of childcare without a system of support, and the family's dependence on the return of the absent soldier. I then argue that Heracles' madness completely upends these themes, destroying their relation to the action by violently eradicating the people to whom they were relevant: his wife and children. The total contradiction between the two parts of the play is deliberate and makes a point. "The most

³⁸⁹ See Griffiths (2006) 76-77 on the theme of motherhood.

³⁹⁰ The text of *Heracles* is taken from Diggle's (1981) OCT edition.

violent structural *tour de force* in Greek tragedy,” as Arrowsmith calls it,³⁹¹ is disturbing precisely because it dramatizes the absence of cause and effect in veteran domestic violence. Moreover, the technique of misdirection – falsely foreshadowing the development of themes or plot by analogy with the *Odyssey* – heightens audience identification with the family by placing the audience in the position of harboring false, indeed stereotypical, expectations about the veteran’s return.

Megara as Penelope, the Heracles as an anti-Odyssey

In a short article comparing the *nostos* plots of *Heracles*, *Electra*, and the *Odyssey*, Martin Cropp (1986, 191) notes the similarities between the *Odyssey* and Euripides’ *Heracles*: “*Heracles*, like the *Odyssey*, begins with a portrayal of the hero’s absence. His status and his *oikos* are being vainly defended against usurpation by a faithful wife and other loyal but helpless supporters.”³⁹² In both epic and tragedy, the plot begins at a moment of crisis for those waiting at home. Megara, like Penelope, wants to preserve the nobility of her household and the reputation of her male family members. Several factors, however, make this task difficult: a usurper threatens her family with death; Megara is isolated with her young children, and her only source of support is her aged father-in-law, who can offer little help; the wider society of the *polis* is apathetic or too old to help; and Megara and her family members do not know whether Heracles is dead, or whether he will return in time to save them. These factors propel Megara, like Penelope, to fabricate an imperfect solution – buying time – that appears at first, miraculously and unexpectedly, to work. In the sections that follow, I trace these challenges, their resolution, and reversal in the *Heracles*, in order to show how the play imitates epic from a fifth-century

³⁹¹ Arrowsmith (1956) 45.

³⁹² The beginning of *Heracles* is also strikingly similar to the first half of *Andromache*.

perspective in order to create false expectations about the success of Heracles' pending reunion and reintegration into his household and to delineate challenges relevant for fifth-century waiting wives.

Defending nobility

Mothers of citizens in fifth-century Athens were expected to raise their sons to view a willing death in battle for their city as the noblest form of death, despite the fact that this ideal is at odds with the mother's desire to protect her children from harm.³⁹³ The "noble death" (καλὸς θάνατος) has an aristocratic pedigree: Homer, Simonides, and Pindar praise deaths in battle as glorious.³⁹⁴ The Athenian *polis*, as Nicole Loraux (2006, 147) has shown in her analysis of funeral orations, redefines the noble death on behalf of the city as the "only source of all valor." As daughter of the former tyrant of Thebes and wife of Heracles, Megara makes much of her aristocratic ancestry, arguing for a "noble death," redefined to meet her unusual circumstances, as the best – if not only – way to prove their nobility as the family of the famous Heracles. In bridging the aristocratic past and the democratic present, the concept of the "noble death" anchors this mythological drama in the ideological reality of fifth-century Athens, where mothers and wives were expected to participate in the *polis*'s glorification of a noble death in battle on behalf of their city.

³⁹³ On the concept of the "noble death" in fifth-century Athens, see Loraux (2006, orig. 1986) 145-171, *et passim*, and Arrington (2015) 26-27, 183-188.

³⁹⁴ Achilles chooses death in battle and glory (κλέος) instead of a long life without glory in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 9.410-416), though he questions this choice in the *Odyssey* (*Od.* 11.488-491). See also *Il.* 22.71-73, Tyrt. 10 (West), 27-30, Simonides fr. 8P, 531P. For Simonidean ethical thought in the play, see Cerri (1997). For Pindar, song brings glory to deserving, noble men after their deaths. Cf. *Nem.* 4.79-85, *Nem.* 8.44-48, *Isth.* 7.26-36, and *Isth.* 8.59-71. On the similar rhetorical strategies of Pindar's epinician poems, Simonides' epitaphs for war dead, and the Athenian funeral orations, see Steiner (1999). Loraux (2006, orig. 1986) 18 argues that there is no *kalos thanatos* in epic, only "fine dead men (beaux morts)."

In her first speech, Megara establishes her concern for behaving nobly, especially as expressed for men in warfare. Her elaborate address to her father-in-law, Amphitryon, which emphasizes his valor in previous battles, appeals to his courage in war:

ὦ πρόσβυ, Ταφίων ὅς ποτ' ἐξείλες πόλιν
στρατηλατήσας κλεινὰ Καδμείων δορός... (60-61)

O old man, you who once sacked the city of the Taphians,
gloriously commanding the army of Cadmeians...

By addressing Amphitryon in this way, Megara rejects his portrait of himself as old and useless (γέροντ' ἀχρεῖον, 42) and foreshadows her later arguments for pursuing a “noble death,” just as he did as a young soldier (288-289).

Megara’s argument for a “noble death” is provoked by Lycus’ verbal attack on her husband’s character and reputation (140-169). Rather than answer Lycus with words, as Amphitryon does (170-235), Megara responds with action, and publicly urges Amphitryon to join her in daring to endure death (τόλμα μεθ’ ἡμῶν θάνατον, 307). In this way, Megara fashions their deaths as a kind of last stand in battle; like hoplites, they face death head-on and willingly:

ἡμᾶς δ', ἐπειδὴ δεῖ θανεῖν, θνήσκειν χρεῶν
μὴ πυρὶ καταξανθέντας, ἐχθροῖσιν γέλων
διδόντας, οὐμοὶ τοῦ θανεῖν μείζον κακόν.
ὀφείλομεν γὰρ πολλὰ δώμασιν καλά·
σὲ μὲν δόκησις ἔλαβεν εὐκλεῆς δορός,
ὥστ' οὐκ ἀνεκτὸν δειλίας θανεῖν σ' ὑπο,
οὐμὸς δ' ἀμαρτύρητος εὐκλεῆς πόσις,
ὅς τούσδε παῖδας οὐκ ἂν ἐκσῶσαι θέλοι
δόξαν κακὴν λαβόντας· οἱ γὰρ εὐγενεῖς
κάμνουσι τοῖς αἰσχροῖσι τῶν τέκνων ὑπερ·
ἐμοὶ τε μίμημ' ἀνδρὸς οὐκ ἀπωστέον. (284-294)

But we, since we must die, should not die
wasted away by fire, making our enemies laugh,
which, in my view, is a greater evil than death.
For we owe many noble deeds to the house:

you received a glorious reputation as a warrior,
so that it is not tolerable for you to die because of cowardice;
and even without witnesses my husband is glorious,
who would not be willing to save these children
if they should receive a bad reputation; for noble parents
are distressed by the shameful deeds of their children,
and I must not refuse to imitate my husband.

Although Amphytrion has proposed other options – further delay or exile, for example – Megara presents the choice more starkly, in terms of a shameful or a less shameful death. She frames her choice of a noble death in terms of preserving the reputation of her family, which is defined by the noble deeds of men in war – she appeals to the martial valor of both Amphytrion (288-289) and Heracles (290-292). Noble deeds in war are thus matched by domestic noble deeds, performed by the family for the home (ὀφείλομεν γὰρ πολλὰ δώμασιν καλά, 287). In also choosing this less shameful type of death for herself, Megara imitates her husband (μίμημ' ἄνδρός, 294), displaying her *homophrosyne* with him and proving his nobility against the attacks of Lycus.

Penelope provides a model for Megara's defense of her husband's nobility. In several passages in the *Odyssey*, as discussed in Chapter 2, Penelope narrates a story about Odysseus in order to contrast his noble behavior with the shameful behavior of the suitors. At 16.424-433 she reminds Antinous that Odysseus restrained the people of Ithaca from destroying Antinous' father and consuming his property. She condemns his behavior in her home by comparison: "That man's house you now consume without repayment, and woo his wife, and try to kill his child, and cause me great distress. I command you to stop and to order the others to stop" (*Od.* 16.431-433). At *Od.* 18.251-280, Penelope contrasts Odysseus' concern for her and his household's well-being after his departure with the suitors' disrespect for her and her household as they consume the house's wealth without providing gifts of their own. Megara's defense of her

family's nobility, as demonstrated by their willingness to face death, similarly aims at preserving the noble reputation of her household and at detracting from the feigned nobility of Lycus, who has usurped her family's throne.

Megara's speech persuades Amphitryon to offer his neck bravely to the sword (ιδού, πάρεστιν ἦδε φασγάνῳ δέρον, 319). The speech also prompts a concession from Lycus that allows Megara both to buy time and to frame their deaths as even more noble:

κόσμον πάρες μοι παισὶ προσθεῖναι νεκρῶν,
δόμους ἀνοίξας (νῦν γὰρ ἐκκεκλήμεθα),
ὥς ἀλλὰ ταῦτά γ' ἀπολάχωσ' οἴκων πατρὸς. (329-331)

Allow me to add funeral adornments to the children,
having opened the doors to the house (for we are now locked out),
so that, at any rate, they may receive these things as their patrimony from their
father's house.

The hyperbaton of κόσμον and νεκρῶν emphasizes the funeral adornments and creates a verbal picture of them encircling both Megara and, especially, the children.³⁹⁵ Like Penelope's shroud for Laertes,³⁹⁶ perhaps alluded to in these funeral adornments, Megara's request delays the crisis a little longer, without detracting from the family's noble reputation, as Amphitryon's other suggestions for delay had done (cf. 303-306). The proper adornments instead make their deaths appear more noble or fine, both in that they beautify the boys and in that they link them more closely with Heracles: Megara uses legal language (ἀπολάχωσι, 331) to indicate that this final request is another way of linking her children with their father.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ Bond (1981) *ad* 329 notes the “‘encircling’ hyperbaton of emphatic words.”

³⁹⁶ Penelope's shroud trick is described three times in the *Odyssey*: Od. 2.93-110, 19.137-56, and 24.129-148. On the differences between these iterations, see Lowenstam (2000).

³⁹⁷ Wilamowitz (1959) *ad* 331 notes the technical significance of the term: “λαγχάνω ist das technische Wort für den Antritt der Erbschaft: es steht also hier mit bitterstem Rechte.”

The theme of the children's inheritance shows how much hope the parents had invested in the boys. In Megara's noble death speech (284-294), she concentrates on nobility, as defined by their mode of death, as a kind of inheritance. In her final long speech of the play, she expands upon the theme by telling an anecdote that calls attention to the bright futures they might have had, while also linking their inherited nobility closely with Heracles' martial exploits:

ἦ πολὺ γε δόξης ἐξέπεσον εὐέλπιδος,
 ἦν πατρὸς ὑμῶν ἐκ λόγων ποτ' ἤλπισα.
 σοὶ μὲν γὰρ Ἄργος ἔνεμ' ὁ κατθανὼν πατήρ,
 Εὐρυσθέως δ' ἔμελλες οἰκήσειν δόμους
 τῆς καλλικάρπου κράτος ἔχων Πελασγίας,
 στολήν τε θηρὸς ἀμφέβαλλε σῶ κάρρα
 λέοντος, ἦπερ αὐτὸς ἐξωπλίζετο.
 σὺ δ' ἦσθα Θηβῶν τῶν φιλαρμάτων ἀναξ
 ἔγκληρα πεδία τὰμὰ γῆς κεκτημένος,
 ὡς ἐξέπειθες τὸν κατασπεύραντά σε,
 ἐς δεξιάν τε σὴν ἀλεξητήριον
 ξύλον καθίει δαίδαλον, ψευδῆ δόσιν.
 σοὶ δ' ἦν ἔπερσε τοῖς ἐκηβόλοις ποτὲ
 τόξοισι δώσειν Οἰχαλίαν ὑπέσχετο.
 τρεῖς δ' ὄντας <ὑμᾶς> τριπύχοις τυραννίσιν
 πατήρ ἐπύργου, μέγα φρονῶν εὐανδρία. (460-475)

Surely I have fallen far from the hopeful expectation,
 which I once hoped for from your father's words.
 For your dead father used to allot Argos to you,
 and you were going to inhabit the palace of Eurystheus,
 holding sway over Pelasgia, rich in crops,
 and he used to place the skin of the beast on your head,
 the lion, with which he himself was armed.
 But you used to be the lord of Thebes, fond of chariots,
 having acquired my fields of land as your inheritance,
 and he lowered into your right hand the finely crafted club
 used for defense, a pretend gift.
 And to you he promised to give Oechalia,
 which he sacked once with far-shooting arrows.
 And since you are three, your father fortified you
 with threefold kingships, exceedingly proud of his bravery.

By recounting this scene of serious play between father and sons, Megara draws a picture of what her sons have lost, while at the same time indicating, through the transfer of weapons, that

they were to inherit their father's bravery in battle (εὐανδρία, 475). Heracles' weapons explicitly mark this martial valor: even the lion's skin is described as armor (ἐξωπλίζετο, 466), while the club is marked as a weapon of defense (ἀλεξητήριον, 470), and the bow and arrows, which were the subject of the *agon* between Lycus and Amphitryon (157-164, 188-203), receive their Homeric epithet, "far-shooting" (ἐκηβόλοις, 472), normally applied to the far-shooting god, Apollo.³⁹⁸ To conclude this scene, Megara uses explicitly martial language to describe the provisions that Heracles made for his sons: he "fortified" (ἐπύργου, 475) them as a testament to his courage in battle.

The verb ἐπύργου (475) also indicates that he intended his military actions, symbolized by his weapons, to defend his sons as towers defend cities and territories. The absence of Heracles as defender of his children as they now face death contrasts piquantly with this anecdote. Yet the weapons also foreshadow, in hindsight, the reversal of the play, in which he uses these very weapons, the club and the bow and arrows, to murder his children and wife (967-1000). The theme of the family's noble deaths is a tragic misdirection; the children and Megara in fact receive ignoble, pitiable deaths at their father's hands, by the very weapons that he believed would defend them. Nonetheless, the theme characterizes Megara as protecting the reputation of her husband and children, even in the most extreme circumstances, when she could not protect them in any other way. This tragic misdirection increases the *pathos* of the family's horrendous deaths by making their earlier situation, framed by Megara as a death similar to that of hoplites in the front lines, seem preferable.

³⁹⁸ On the *agon* between Lycus and Amphitryon and the bow as a prop, see George (1994).

The absence of friends

Although many scholars have addressed the theme of *philia* in the play, few have made a case for its significance in the first half of the play, as they prefer to focus on the importance of *philia* in Heracles' decision to reject suicide.³⁹⁹ The focus of the theme in the first half of the play is the lack of *philia* that Heracles' family experiences in his absence. Megara's only male relative and advocate is her aged father-in-law, who repeatedly emphasizes his ineffectiveness because of his old age (cf. γέροντ' ἀχρεῖον, 42; ἀσθενῆ φίλον, 228; 230-235). Penelope, similarly, considers turning to Laertes to advocate on her behalf when she learns about the suitors' plot against Telemachus (4.739-741), despite the fact that Laertes has retired from public life in grief for his absent son and dead wife (cf. 1.189-193). The Ithacans, however, as portrayed in the assembly scene in Book 2, are likewise ineffective, either allied to the suitors or rendered useless by grief and loss, as exemplified by Aegyptius (2.15-24). Indeed, like Penelope's family, besieged in their home by the suitors and abandoned by Ithacan society, Megara's family is socially isolated, despite Heracles' prior service to the community. This lack of support proves a significant challenge to both wives' attempts to preserve their household and family.

Indeed, widows with young children were an especially vulnerable social group in fifth-century Athens.⁴⁰⁰ Whereas war orphans were supported by the state, widows received no formal support unless pregnant (*Ath. Pol.* 56.7). Fourth-century funeral orations, however, demonstrate that citizens recognized an informal duty to help the wives of the deceased in addition to their

³⁹⁹ Sheppard (1916) first traced the themes of friendship, wealth, and strength across the entire play. See also Conacher (1955), Johnson (2002), and Vella (2004) 94-129.

⁴⁰⁰ Megara, Lycus, the Chorus, and eventually Amphitryon all believe that Heracles has died and will not return from Hades. At least at the beginning of the play, it is valid to view Megara as a "war widow." For the vulnerability of widows with young children, see Isager (1981), Hunter (1989), and Cudjoe (2010).

children (cf. Lys. 2.75, Plat. *Men.* 248c).⁴⁰¹ The absence of support for Megara and her children in Thebes casts the Thebans as ungrateful for Heracles' service to them and contrasts sharply with the support offered later in the play by Theseus and Athens.⁴⁰² In this case, thematic misdirection functions differently than in the case of the theme of noble death; the Thebans' lack of *philia* serves as a negative foil to the *philia* offered by Theseus and Athens, and serves to remind Athenians of their informal duties to the families of soldiers.

Amphitryon flags the theme of *philia*, as it will play out in the first half of the play, at the end of his opening speech:

φίλων δὲ τοὺς μὲν οὐ σαφείς ὀρῶ φίλους,
οἱ δ' ὄντες ὀρθῶς ἀδύνατοι προσωφελεῖν.
τοιούτον ἀνθρώποισιν ἢ δυσπραξία·
ἦς μήποθ' ὅστις καὶ μέσως εὖνους ἐμοὶ
τύχοι, φίλων ἔλεγχον ἀψευδέστατον. (55-59)

Some of our friends, I see, are not real friends,
While those who truly are cannot help us.
Such a thing as this is misfortune for men:
may anyone who is even moderately loyal to me
never experience it, the truest test of friends.

The first group he mentions, the friends who are not true (οὐ σαφείς, 5), are the Thebans and even the rest of the able-bodied Greeks, who do not come to the aid of Heracles' family despite the fact that he benefitted them in so many ways. The friends who are true, but incapable of helping are represented by the Chorus of Theban elders, who, like Amphitryon, cannot help the family because of their weakness and old age: as they say in the *parodos*, they are “words only

⁴⁰¹ On the framing of these obligations as “honors” for the families of the deceased, see Loraux (2006, orig. 1986) 55.

⁴⁰² Zeitlin (1990) argues that Thebes “provides the negative model to Athens’ manifest image of itself with regard to its notions of the proper management of city, society, and self.” On the portrayal of Thebes in *Heracles*, see also Bernardini (1997) and Cerri (1997). On the glorification of Athens in the play, see Tarkow (1977).

and the vision of dreams that appear at night” (ἔπεα μόνον καὶ δόκημα νυκτερω- / πὸν ἐννύχων ὄνειρων, 112-113; cf. 436-441). When he unexpectedly returns and finds his family in danger, Heracles also laments the absence of friends in times of misfortune (558-561). The ending of the play reverses the situation: Heracles attempts to drive away his friend, Theseus, when he appears at perhaps the most unfortunate moment of Heracles’ life.

The family of Heracles expects help from the Thebans in return for Heracles’ war with the Minyans, and from the Greeks for his labors. In Amphitryon’s speech during his *agon* with Lycus, he reproaches both groups for their disloyalty to his son as reflected in their treatment of his family:

ὦ γαῖα Κάδμου (καὶ γὰρ ἐς σ’ ἀφίξομαι
λόγους ὄνειδιστήρας ἐνδατούμενος),
τοιαῦτ’ ἀμύνεθ’ Ἡρακλεῖ τέκνοισί τε;
Μινύαις ὅς εἰς ἅπασι διὰ μάχης μολῶν
Θήβας ἔθηκεν ὄμμ’ ἐλεύθερον βλέπειν.
οὐδ’ Ἑλλάδ’ ἦνεσ’ (οὐδ’ ἀνέξομαί ποτε
σιγῶν) κακίστην λαμβάνων ἐς παῖδ’ ἐμόν,
ἦν χρῆν νεοσσοῖς τοῖσδε πῦρ λόγχας ὅπλα
φέρουσαν ἐλθεῖν, ποντίων καθαρωμάτων
χέρσου τ’ ἀμοιβὰς ὧν †ἐμόχθησας χάριν†.
τὰ δ’ ὦ τέκν’, ὑμῖν οὔτε Θηβαίων πόλις
οὔθ’ Ἑλλάς ἀρκεῖ· πρὸς δ’ ἔμ’ ἀσθενῆ φίλον
δεδόρακα’, οὐδὲν ὄντα πλὴν γλώσσης ψόφον. (217-229)

O land of Cadmus (for I will also come to you
as I distribute my words of reproach)
such help as this you offer Heracles and his children,
the man who went into battle, one man against all the Minyans,
and made Thebes look with a free glance.
Nor do I praise Greece (I will never endure
keeping silent) since I catch her being the worst toward my son,
for she should have come bringing fire, spears, shields
to these hatchlings, in exchange for the cleansing of sea
and land, for the sake of which you, Heracles, toiled.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰³ For objections to the text of L here as “weak and pleonastic,” see Bond (1981) *ad* 226. I have translated the manuscript reading without emendation.

This defense neither the city of Thebans nor Greece
offers you, o children; you have looked, instead,
toward me, a weak friend, nothing besides a noise of the tongue.

By calling attention to the absence of support from the Thebans and other Greeks, Amphitryon attempts to rouse pity for the children, whom he calls “hatchlings” (νεοσσοίς, 224), the same word that Megara had earlier used for the children (cf. νεοσσούς, 72). He also appeals to informal protections that the Athenians, at least, believed should be offered to family members of soldiers who died in service to the city. In his funeral oration, Lysias reminds the Athenians of these duties to the families of fallen soldiers:

μόνην δ' ἄν μοι δοκοῦμεν ταύτην τοῖς ἐνθάδε κειμένοις ἀποδοῦναι χάριν, εἰ τοὺς μὲν τοκέας αὐτῶν ὁμοίως ὥσπερ ἐκείνοι περὶ πολλοῦ ποιούμεθα, τοὺς δὲ παῖδας οὕτως ἀσπαζοίμεθα ὥσπερ αὐτοὶ πατέρες ὄντες, ταῖς δὲ γυναῖξιν εἰ τοιούτους βοηθοὺς ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς παρέχοιμεν, οἰοίπερ ἐκείνοι ζῶντες ἦσαν. τίνας γὰρ ἂν εἰκότως μᾶλλον τιμῶμεν τῶν ἐνθάδε κειμένων;⁴⁰⁴ (2.75-76)

It seems to me that we have this one way to pay back these men lying here, if we should hold their parents in the same high regard as they themselves did, and if we should embrace their children as if we were ourselves their fathers, and if we should provide such support to their wives as those men did while living. For whom could we more suitably honor than these men lying here?

In reality, the responsibility for caring for the wives and young children of dead soldiers fell upon the natal family of the wife – her father or brothers.⁴⁰⁵ Nonetheless, the Athenians, as their funeral orations show, believed that the city should demonstrate their gratitude for soldiers' sacrifices by caring for their parents, widows, and children. Amphitryon's speech, which is echoed by the Chorus at 264-267, appeals to the Athenians' ideal of political activism.⁴⁰⁶ The

⁴⁰⁴ The text of Lysias is taken from Carey's (2007) OCT edition.

⁴⁰⁵ For the social reality of widow's lives, see Hunter (1989).

⁴⁰⁶ Political activism – *πράσσω πόλλα* (266), as the Chorus says – was characterized by others as being a “meddler” or “busybody.” For this Athenian quality, cf. Eur. *Supp.* 572-577, and discussion by de Romilly (1963) 135, Demont (1990) 160-162, and Leigh (2013) 35-45.

demand for such *charis* owed to Heracles' family by the city, and indeed, the entire Greek world, foreshadows the euergetism of Theseus and his city, Athens, toward Heracles at the end of the play.

The theme of the family's lack of friends also raises expectations of negative requital to the Thebans from Heracles that are similarly abandoned after his madness. When he returns to find his family proceeding to their execution, Heracles indicates that he too expected reciprocity for his war against the Minyans in the form of protection for his family during his absence:

Ηρ. οὔτω δ' ἀπόντες ἐσπανίζομεν φίλων;
Με. φίλοι γάρ εἰσιν ἀνδρὶ δυστυχεῖ τίνες;
Ηρ. μάχας δὲ Μινυῶν ἅς ἔτλην ἀπέπτυσαν;
Με. ἄφιλον, ἴν' αὐθὶς σοι λέγω, τὸ δυστυχές. (558-561)

Her. Was I so lacking in friends while absent?
Me. Yes, for what friends does a man in misfortune have?
Her. And did they spurn the battles with the Minyans that I endured?
Me. Again I tell you, misfortune is friendless.

This exchange prompts a rant by Heracles against Lycus and the Thebans in which he renounces his labors and threatens to kill them with his club and bow (562-582). Yet this promise of revenge against the Thebans for their lack of reciprocity remains unfulfilled, as Heracles' madness follows quickly on the heels of his murder of Lycus. The beginning of the play establishes a theme – the absence of friends in times of misfortune – that is dropped and eventually reversed in the latter half of the play, as Theseus and the entire city of Athens come to Heracles' aid. Nonetheless, the portrayal of Heracles' family abandoned by friends and *polis* remains a powerful reminder to the Athenian audience of the informal obligations they promised to soldier's families, and the social and cultural isolation that these families often confronted in the soldier's absence and after his death.

Childcare, the single parent, and the deceptive power of hope

The children of Heracles and Megara are the focus of their relationship from the beginning of the play, as Megara is presented as an ideal mother in contrast to Heracles' destructive divine stepmother, Hera.⁴⁰⁷ In scenes that Godfrey Bond (1981, *ad* 73-79) describes as "sentimental *Kleinmalerei*,"⁴⁰⁸ Euripides vividly depicts the voices of these children and their dependence upon both parents. The imagery of dependence is reversed in the second half of the play as Heracles leaves the stage supported by Theseus. Yet in the first half of the play such passages focusing on the children's vulnerability and their need for their absent father bring to life the everyday struggles of the single parent while her spouse is away on campaigns. They also depict Megara struggling against the deceptive power of hope: Heracles' survival is uncertain, but Megara allows her children to hope for his return and defers their questions by telling stories. At the same time, Megara herself believes, like the pessimistic Penelope, that Heracles has died, as she has been informed by Eurystheus' lying heralds (551-553).

The first of such scenes, in Megara's first speech of the play, calls attention to the children's interest in their father's whereabouts and their vulnerability in his absence:

οἱ δ' εἰς ἔλεγχον ἄλλος ἄλλοθεν πίτνων
ὦ μήτεο, ἀυδᾶ, ποῖ πατήρ ἄπεστι γῆς;
τί δοῦν, πόθ' ἤξει; τῷ νέφ' δ' ἐσφαλμένοι
ζητοῦσι τὸν τεκόντ', ἐγὼ δὲ διαφέρω
λόγοισι μυθεύουσα. θαυμάζων δ' ὅταν
πύλαι ψοφῶσι πᾶς ἀνίστησιν πόδα,
ὡς πρὸς πατρῶον προσπεσούμενοι γόνυ. (73-79)

⁴⁰⁷ On the theme of motherhood in the play, see Griffiths (2006) 76-77. This theme also splits in the middle of the play: Megara occupies the first half of the play, Hera, as the force behind Lyssa, the second. It contrasts with the theme of Zeus as father, Heracles as son. For a discussion of the father-son relationship in *Heracles*, see Mikalson (1986) and Padilla (1994). On children in Greek tragedy, see Sifakis (1979) and Zeitlin (2008).

⁴⁰⁸ Bond cites Schmid and Stählin (1940) 787 n. 7 for a description of this genre in Greek literature.

They fall to questioning me, one from one direction, another from another,
saying, “Mother, where in the world is father?
What is he doing, when will he return? Confused by their youth
they look for their father, while I distract them
by telling them stories. And whenever
the doors creak, they all leap to their feet in amazement,
so as to fall in supplication at their father’s knee.

The hope of Heracles’ sons for his imminent return contrasts with Megara’s belief that he has died and will not return to save them. Yet Megara continues to tell the children stories in order to distract them and justify his absence – in vain, perhaps, as they anticipate his return with every creak of the door’s hinges. The vivid image of the children jumping up to fall at their father’s knees eerily foreshadows the death of one of the children:

φθάνει δ’ ὁ τλήμων γόνασι προσπεσὼν πατρὸς
καὶ πρὸς γένειον χεῖρα καὶ δέρον βαλὼν
ᾧ φίλτατ’, αὐδᾶ, μή μ’ ἀποκτείνης, πάτερ·
σὸς εἰμι, σὸς παῖς· οὐ τὸν Εὐρυσθέως ὀλεῖς. (986-989)

The wretched boy, falling in supplication at his father’s knees, anticipates him, and casting his hand toward his chin and neck says,
“Dearest father, don’t kill me! I am yours, your son.
It is not the son of Eurystheus whom you destroy.”

These two acts of supplication, one imaginary and one real, demonstrate the vulnerability of Heracles’ children both in his absence and in his presence. The direct speech of the children, flagged by αὐδᾶ (74, 988), also connects the two passages, drawing attention to the irony of the reversal. The children’s expectations of their father’s return – that he will protect them from danger – prove disastrously false.

Another scene of *Kleinmalerei* also depicts the dependence of the children upon their father in order to set up an ironic reversal in the second half of the play. After Heracles returns unexpectedly, he escorts Megara and the children back into the house, as the children cling to his clothing:

ἀλλ' εἰ' ὀμαρτεῖτ', ὦ τέκν', ἐς δόμους πατρί·
 καλλίονές τ' ἄρ' εἴσοδοι τῶν ἐξόδων
 πάρεσιν ὑμῖν. ἀλλὰ θάρσος ἴσχετε
 καὶ νάματ' ὄσσων μηκέτ' ἐξανίετε,
 σύ τ', ὦ γύναι μοι, σύλλογον ψυχῆς λαβὲ
 τρόμου τε παῦσαι, καὶ μέθεσθ' ἐμῶν πέπλων·
 οὐ γὰρ περωτὸς οὐδὲ φευξείω φίλους.
 ἂ,
 οἶδ' οὐκ ἀφιάσ' ἀλλ' ἀνάπτονται πέπλων
 τοσῶδε μᾶλλον· ὦδ' ἔβητ' ἐπὶ ξυροῦ;
 ἄξω λαβῶν γε τούσδ' ἐφολκίδας χερσῶν,
 ναῦς δ' ὡς ἐφέλξω· καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἀναίνομαι
 θεράπευμα τέκνων· πάντα τ' ἀνθρώπων ἴσα·
 φιλοῦσι παῖδας οἳ τ' ἀμείνονες βροτῶν
 οἳ τ' οὐδὲν ὄντες· χρήμασιν δὲ διάφοροι·
 ἔχουσιν, οἳ δ' οὐ· πᾶν δὲ φιλότεκνον γένος. (622-636)

But come on, children, accompany your father into the house;
 So your entrances are better than your exits,
 are they? Take courage
 and don't cry any longer,
 and you, my wife, pull yourself together
 and stop trembling, and all of you, let go of my clothes.
 I don't have wings and I don't want to abandon my family.
 Ah!

These boys don't let go, but grab my clothes
 all the more; were you walking on a razor's edge?
 I will lead these boys, taking them as tow boats in my hands,
 and like a ship I will drag them behind me. For I do not refuse
 to look after my children. In all things people are equal:
 both the better among men and those who are worth nothing
 love their children; they differ in wealth:
 some have, others do not, but the entire race of men is child-loving.

The metatheatrical reference to the children's entrances and exits (623-624) creates a contrast between this entrance and their previous exit from the house, during which they were dragged onstage, in an action parallel to this one, by their mother. The Chorus narrates,

ἀλλ' ἐσορῶ γὰρ τούσδε φθιμένων
 ἔνδυτ' ἔχοντας,
 τοὺς τοῦ μεγάλου δὴ ποτε παῖδας
 τὸ πρὶν Ἡρακλέους, ἄλοχόν τε φίλην
 † ὑπὸ σειραίοις ποσίν† ἔλκυσαν
 τέκνα καὶ γεραιὸν πατέρ' Ἡρακλέους.

δύστηνος ἐγώ,
δακρύων ὡς οὐ δύναμαι κατέχειν
γροαίας ὄσσων ἔτι πηγάς. (442-450)

But look, I see the children wearing
the clothing of the dead,
the children indeed of Heracles
the once mighty, and his dear wife,
dragging the children under her feet
like trace horses, and the old father of Heracles.
I am wretched,
as I can no longer restrain the old springs
of tears from my eyes.

Halleran (1985, 86) points out that these two passages are “mirror scenes” that bookend the episode. He draws attention to the similarities between the two, noting that ἐφέλξω echoes ἔλκουσαν and that both scenes feature springs of tears. On the irony that these resemblances create, he remarks, “The entrance from the *skene* at the beginning of the scene seemed to mean the family’s death and did not, while the exit which concludes the scene seems to indicate their safety and does not.”⁴⁰⁹ I would add that by emphasizing his own love and care (θεράπευμα, 633) for his children in addition to the general tendency of all men to love their children in a gnome (633-636), he plants a seed that, after the murder of the children, enhances the horror of Heracles’ loss.

The image of the tugboat also resurfaces in the play’s second reversal, as Heracles exits the stage leaning upon his friend, Theseus, who has offered him protection and honors in Athens:

ἡμεῖς δ’ ἀναλώσαντες αἰσχύναις δόμον
Θησεῖ πανώλεις ἐψόμεσθ’ ἐφογκίδες.
ὅστις δὲ πλοῦτον ἢ σθένος μᾶλλον φίλων
ἀγαθῶν πεπᾶσθαι βούλεται κακῶς φρονεῖ. (1423-1426)

After destroying my house with shameful deeds,
I, completely miserable, will follow Theseus like a tug-boat.

⁴⁰⁹ Halleran (1985) 86.

And whoever wishes to obtain wealth or strength more
than good friends is a fool.

As Bond (1981, *ad* 1424) remarks, this scene also ends with a gnome emphasizing the importance of human relationships, but whereas the first highlighted children, this one highlights the importance of friends. The repetition of the tug-boat image calls attention to the reversal of roles: Heracles now clings to Theseus as his children did to him.⁴¹⁰ By showing the children hanging from their father's clothes, and reviving the image in this last scene, the playwright dramatizes the children's tragically false expectations of their father's ability to protect them.

The children's false expectations are juxtaposed with their mother's; whereas the children in the first half of the play believe that Heracles still lives, and thus cling to their memories of him as their only means of salvation, Megara believes that Heracles has died, but that if he were to return somehow, he would save them. Despairing of Heracles' return, Megara rejects any hope or means of salvation (ἐλπίδ' ἢ πόρον σωτηρίας, 80). The repetition of σωτηρία in the first half of the play (54, 80, 84, 304) sets up the expectation for a reversal of fortune, which in fact occurs: when Heracles miraculously appears as if summoned by Megara's prayers, she calls him "no less than Zeus the Savior to you [children]" (Διὸς / σωτήρος ὑμῖν οὐδέν ἐσθ' ὄδ' ὕστερος, 521-522).

Since the family had been suppliants at the altar of Zeus the Savior, set up by Heracles after his victory over the Minyans (48-50), but had not been protected by it, Megara's pronouncement foreshadows the second, devastating reversal of the play, in which Heracles turns from savior to murderer. Her expectations – first that Heracles has died, and then that he will return from his labors the same man as he had been before – are both shown to be false. Unlike

⁴¹⁰ On Theseus as a surrogate father to Heracles, see Padilla (1994) 296-299.

Penelope, who tests her husband to discover whether he remains emotionally solid, like their bed,⁴¹¹ Megara takes no such precautions. Instead, she, along with the audience, is surprised by Heracles' sudden change from protective husband and father to murderer.

Lyssa, PTSD, and veteran domestic violence

Lyssa's arrival onstage radically changes the script of the play from a drama with a miraculous rescue to a tragedy of domestic violence.⁴¹² In Homer, *λύσσα* always refers to battle lust.⁴¹³ While *λύσσα* in tragedy can refer to other types of maddened behavior,⁴¹⁴ I argue that Heracles' madness manifests itself as displaced battle lust, similar to a flashback, in which soldiers suffering from PTSD relive scenarios from their battle experiences.⁴¹⁵ Euripides' personified Lyssa initially resists the displacement of this battle lust into the home, arguing that Heracles does not deserve this kind of punishment. Yet when she finally agrees to do her job, she stages Heracles' madness as a military assault upon his own home. As the Messenger describes the scene, Heracles' mad fit of violence follows the pattern of veteran domestic violence: it appears abruptly, without a period of escalation; ends in the deaths of his family members;

⁴¹¹ See my discussion of the test of the bed in Chapter 2.

⁴¹² Baudy (1993) argues that both parts of the play develop the theme of the "verkehrten Welt"; in the first part, Lycus' name, which means "wolf," flags the theme, while in the second part, Lyssa, "die personifizierte 'Wolfswut,'" flags its revival.

⁴¹³ Cf. *Il.* 9.239, 305, 21.542. On Homeric *lyssa*, see Hershkowitz (1998) 127-129.

⁴¹⁴ Readings of Heracles' madness are split between those who believe that his madness is external and divine and those who believe that it is internal and naturalized. On Heracles' madness as external, see Silk (1985) 14-15, Hartigan (1987), Padel (1995) 17-20, and Riley (2008) 30-31, among others. Wilamowitz (1959, vol. 2) 123-130 is the primary proponent of the argument that Heracles' madness is internal and prepared for by hints in the preceding narrative (the "seeds of madness" theory). Holmes (2008) argues that Heracles' madness "cannot be definitively classified as internal or external. Nor is there one idea of what is inside and what is outside a human being in late fifth-century Athens." More important, for my purposes, is the direct link between Heracles' madness and his belief that he is attacking his enemy, Eurystheus. In this respect, Heracles' madness could be seen as both external, in that Hera triggers the episode, and internal, in that different personalities handle trauma differently.

⁴¹⁵ On flashbacks as symptoms of PTSD, see Shay (1994) 172-173 and Morris (2015) 60-61, 108-110.

involves the hallucination of a battle against an enemy similar to the flashbacks that accompany PTSD; and results in Heracles withdrawing in shame and contemplating suicide.

Euripides dramatizes the abruptness of Heracles' violence through the surprise appearance of Lyssa onstage. The preceding Choral ode, a joyous celebration of Heracles' return and triumph over Lycus, ends by juxtaposing a strong statement of theodicy with their alarm, expressed in excited lyrics, at the sudden appearance of the goddess (809-821). Stage convention, as Bond (1981, *ad* 815ff.) notes, also enhances the surprise, as Euripides and the other tragedians almost never stage divine epiphanies outside of the prologues and epilogues, where they are used to explain events in the past or future, outside of the frame of the drama.⁴¹⁶ The only other exception occurs in *Rhesus*, when Athena arrives onstage midway through the play in order to direct Odysseus' raid against Rhesus (595).

Such generic expectations heighten the surprise of Lyssa's arrival with Iris; even more shocking, however, is Euripides' characterization of Lyssa, Madness personified,⁴¹⁷ as rational:

ἔξ εὐγενοῦς μὲν πατρὸς ἔκ τε μητέρος
πέφυκα, Νυκτὸς Οὐρανοῦ τ' ἀφ' αἵματος·
ἴτιμάς τ' ἔχω τάσδ' οὐκ ἀγασθῆναι φίλοις†
οὐδ' ἡδομαι φοιτῶσ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώπων φίλους.
παραινέσαι δέ, πρὶν σφαλείσαν εἰσιδεῖν,
Ἦραι θέλω σοί τ', ἦν πίθησθ' ἐμοῖς λόγοις.
ἀνήρ ὄδ' οὐκ ἄσημος οὔτ' ἐπὶ χθονὶ

⁴¹⁶ Halleran (1985) 26 remarks that "In a sense, all divine appearances are surprises; neither the character nor the audience is prepared for them (although an experienced member of the audience might expect them now and then)." In *Heracles*, not even the most experienced member of the audience could predict, through generic conventions, the arrival of Iris and Lyssa halfway through the action of the play. On epiphanies in Euripides, see Michelini (1987) 102-111 and Wildberg (1999) 245-256. On the narratological function of gods onstage in tragedy, see Easterling (1993) 80-86. On the use of the *mechane* for divine epiphanies, Aristotle comments, "The *mechane* must be used for events outside of the drama" (μηχανῆ χρηστέον ἐπὶ τὰ ἔξω τοῦ δράματος, *Po.* 1454 b2).

⁴¹⁷ For a comparison between Euripides' Lyssa and the figure of Lyssa in other Attic tragedies, see Duchemin (1967). See also Jouan (1970) 317-319 and Padel (1992) 163 and (1995) 17-20, 142-143. Lyssa had a speaking part in Aeschylus' *Xantriae* (fr. 169R), but we do not know much more about her role. She may have also appeared in Aeschylus' *Toxotides* and *Edonians*.

οὐτ' ἐν θεοῖσιν, οὐ σύ μ' ἐσπέμπεις δόμους·
ἄβατον δὲ χώραν καὶ θάλασσαν ἀγρίαν
ἐξημερώσας θεῶν ἀνέστησεν μόνος
τιμὰς πιτνούσας ἀνοσίων ἀνδρῶν ὕπο.
ὥστ' οὐ παραινῶ μεγάλα βουλευσαι κακά. (843-854)

I was born from a noble father and a noble mother,
from the blood of Night and Ouranos;
†and I have these honors that do not delight the gods†⁴¹⁸
nor do I enjoy visiting those mortals whom I like.
But I want to give advice to Hera, before I see her stumble,
and to you, if you will heed my words.
This man, into whose house you are sending me,
is not without renown either on earth or among the gods;
after he tamed the pathless land and wild sea,
he alone restored the honors of the gods,
which were falling away because of unholy men.
As a result, I advise you not to plot great evils.

Her speech represents a variation of the theme of proper treatment of friends, flagged by φίλους (846), among whom she counts Heracles because of his services to mortals and especially to the gods. Her revival of this theme also contradicts the reason for the mission provided by Iris, who argues that they must punish Heracles because, if he does not pay the penalty, the gods will lose esteem and mortals will become great (ἦ θεοὶ μὲν οὐδαμοῦ, / τὰ θνητὰ δ' ἔσται μεγάλα, μὴ δόντος δίκην, 841-842).⁴¹⁹

Both Lyssa's rational way of speaking, emphasizing her advice through ring composition (παραινέσαι, 847; παραινῶ, 854), and the content of her speech create an image of the goddess contrary to her function in the play; as Iris responds to this speech, "Zeus' wife did not send you

⁴¹⁸ I have adopted Bond's (1981) *ad* 845 suggestion for this corrupt line: τιμὰς δ' ἔχω <θεοῖς> οὐκ ἀγασθῆναι φίλας. φίλους may also be corrupt, with its insertion explained by φίλους in the line below it.

⁴¹⁹ Many scholars have worried about the reason for Heracles' punishment by Hera; Bond (1981) xxiv-xxv points to Hera's traditional χόλος at Zeus' infidelity, but Lee (1982) argues that Heracles' recent successes (about which he is vague) have exacerbated Hera's resentment of the infidelity. Griffiths (2002) argues that Hera punishes Heracles for his theft of Cerberus.

here to have good sense” (οὐχὶ σωφρονεῖν γ’ ἔπεμπε δευρό σ’ ἢ Διὸς δάμαρ, 857). Kevin Lee (1982, 48) calls this Λύσσα σωφρονοῦσα “schizophrenic,”⁴²⁰ but the portrayal of the goddess as rational and averse to her duties dramatizes her displacement in this domestic context and provides a larger, divine context for what seems a cruel and undeserved event.⁴²¹ In the same way, veteran domestic violence can seem random, but is often linked to a wider context of war trauma, particularly PTSD and TBI, which may not be well understood or anticipated by the family that it affects.

Lyssa’s description of her attack on Heracles mixes metaphors from hunting, nature and natural disasters, and athletics in order to emphasize the violence of her assault and to indicate her growing irrationality.⁴²² One detail in her description, in which she threatens to break down Heracles’ roof and collapse the house on their heads (καὶ καταρρήξω μέλαθρα καὶ δόμους ἐπεμβάλω, 864), echoes a threat issued earlier in the play by Heracles against Lycus, in which he threatens to raze his enemy’s house to the ground (κατασκάψω δόμους, 566). In another minor misdirection, Heracles’ home instead becomes the site of violence, as he both murders Lycus there and transforms his home into a violently besieged city while in the grip of Lyssa. The messenger describes how he digs up the doorposts of the room in which his wife and last living child are hiding in order to kill them, just as if he were besieging Mycenae (ὡς ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς δὴ Κυκλωπίοισιν ὄν, 998). The conflation of his own home with the military assault of a city, and his own children with his enemy, Eurystheus’ children, dramatically stages the disturbing displacement of his lust for battle upon his own home.

⁴²⁰ Wilamowitz (1959) 124 coined the clever phrase Λύσσα σωφρονοῦσα.

⁴²¹ Cropp (1986) 192 notes that the “divine adversity” that Heracles faces from Hera is similar to Poseidon’s wrath against Odysseus.

⁴²² On bestial imagery in the scene of Heracles’ madness, see Provenza (2013).

Mad Heracles' conviction that he is conducting a military campaign against Eurystheus' city and family, when he is in fact murdering his wife and children, bears resemblances to veteran domestic violence, as described by wives of veterans. An anonymous wife of a Vietnam veteran interviewed by Aphrodite Matsakis (1996, xxiv) describes her own experiences of abuse as follows: "Why I had to take the beating for something some lieutenant or Viet Cong did twenty years ago is a mystery to me. But when Len was banging my head against the toilet bowl or smashing my back against the refrigerator, the idea made perfect sense to him." The everyday household furnishings in her statement – toilet bowl and refrigerator – function similarly to the mentions of the altar and columns of Heracles' house, behind which his wife and children hide: they demonstrate the disparity between the location and the battle rage that explodes there.

Like many cases of veteran domestic violence, Heracles' sudden assault ends with the deaths of his wife and children, and the literal destruction of his home,⁴²³ a mad inversion of the labors that he had carried out in the service of others. In a violent twist on the Odyssean themes that have permeated this *nostos* play, the husband returns with his bow and kills his family with it instead of his enemies. The sudden appearance of Pallas Athena in the Messenger's account of the end of Heracles' destructive rampage enhances the impression of the home perversely turned into a battlefield, as she wields her "barbed spear" (κροαδίνουσ' ἔγχος ἐπίλογχον χεοί, 1003)⁴²⁴ and checks Heracles from his violence. Her appearance at this moment ironically recalls the *deus ex machina* of Book 24 of the *Odyssey*, in which Athena stops further violence between Odysseus and the Ithacans. Instead of this peaceful and optimistic end to the warrior's return, however, Euripides stages a dark reversal, in which the veteran's trauma invades the home and

⁴²³ On the identification of the hero with his home, see Wohlberg (1968).

⁴²⁴ I have adopted Canter's emendation of this corrupt line.

destroys his family. At the same time, Athena's appearance foreshadows yet another twist: the intervention of Theseus, representative of Athens.

A friend in Athens: Heracles' recuperation

When Heracles wakes from his fitful sleep after murdering his wife and children, he considers suicide the only appropriate response to his shameful deed:

οἶμοι· τί δήτα φείδομαι ψυχῆς ἐμῆς
τῶν φιλτάτων μοι γενόμενος παίδων φονεύς;
οὐκ εἶμι πέτρας λισσάδος πρὸς ἄλματα
ἢ φάσγανον πρὸς ἦπαρ ἑξακοντίσας
τέκνοις δικαστῆς αἵματος γενήσομαι,
ἢ σάρκα †τὴν ἐμὴν† ἐμπρήσας πυρὶ⁴²⁵
δύσκληιαν ἢ μένει μ' ἀπόσομαι βίου; (1146-1152)

Oh me. Why then do I spare my life
when I have become the murderer of my dearest children?
Will I not go leap from a bare cliff
or strike my liver with a sword
and become the avenger of my children's blood,
or burn my flesh with fire
and thrust myself away from the disgrace of my life, which awaits me?

By claiming that his suicide will make him the avenger of his children's blood, Heracles alludes to his rightful role as their protector; ironically, however, he is also the person against whom their deaths must be avenged. Like Ajax, who chooses suicide after recovering from his madness, during which he tortures and murders livestock instead of his commanders, Heracles emphasizes the disgrace (δύσκληιαν, 1152) he feels.⁴²⁶ Only suicide, he believes, will free him from his disgrace.

⁴²⁵ L's τὴν ἐμὴν is unmetrical; possible corrections include Allen's πατρῶον or Wilamowitz's τὴν νεᾶνιν. Whichever correction one adopts, the meaning does not change radically.

⁴²⁶ Cf. Soph. *Aj.* 473-480. On *Heracles* and *Ajax*, see James (1969), de Romilly (2003, orig. 1980), Barlow (1981), Furley (1986), and Worman (1999).

Ajax becomes a casualty of this kind of thinking, familiar to many veterans of more recent wars.⁴²⁷ He had, in fact, planned a “murder-suicide,” which he prays hopelessly for at Aj.

387-391:

ὦ Ζεῦ προγόνων πάτερ,
πῶς ἂν τὸν αἰμυλώτατον,
ἐχθρὸν ἄλημα, τοὺς τε δισ-
άρχας ὀλέσσαις βασιλῆς,
τέλος θάνοιμι καὐτός;

O Zeus, father of my ancestors,
if only I could destroy that wily,
clever enemy, and the twin-
ruling kings,
and finally die myself!

Such murder-suicides are rare, but not unknown among veteran communities today.⁴²⁸ When Heracles discovers his crime, he also nearly becomes a “murder-suicide,” but is saved by his friend, Theseus, who arrives just as he is contemplating suicide as the only option. Ajax, by contrast, has only the company of his concubine and child; his half-brother Teucer arrives too late to prevent his suicide.

The presence of social support in Heracles’ case protects against his suicide. Heracles is the first to note Theseus’ surprise entrance, which immediately follows his remarks on the necessity of suicide. He identifies him first as an “impediment to my death plans” (ἀλλ’ ἐμποδὼν μοι θανασίμων βουλευμάτων, 1153) and second as his friend and kinsman (συγγενῆς φίλος τ’ ἐμός, 1154). Although Heracles thinks of Theseus here as only a temporary

⁴²⁷ The media often quote the rate of veteran suicide in America as “22 a day.” They take this number from the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Suicide Data Report for 2012 (Kemp and Bossarte, 2012). For an alternate interpretation of the data offered in the report, see Bare (2015). For an anecdotal example of the high suicide rate in a battalion, see Philipps (2015).

⁴²⁸ See above, n. 382.

impediment to his plans, Theseus' extension of both personal and political *philia* to Heracles results in his becoming a permanent obstacle to Heracles' suicide.

Theseus, as Bond (1981, *ad* 1163) points out, "exemplifies the good effective friend," in contrast to the hostile Lycus and the ineffective or unfaithful Thebans. Theseus repeatedly refers to his help as repayment of his debt to Heracles, as if responding to the criticisms of Amphitryon, the Chorus, and Megara earlier in the play:

ἤκω σὺν ἄλλοις, οἱ παρ' Ἀσωποῦ ῥοὰς
μένουσιν, ἔνοπλοι γῆς Ἀθηναίων κόροιοι,
σὺ παιδί, πρέσβυ, **σύμμαχον φέρων δόρου**.
κληδῶν γὰρ ἦλθεν εἰς Ἐρεχθιδῶν πόλιν
ὡς σκῆπτρα χώρας τῆσδ' ἀναρπάσας Λύκος
ἔς πόλεμον ὑμῖν καὶ μάχην καθίσταται.
τίνων δ' **ἀμοιβὰς** ὧν ὑπῆρξεν Ἡρακλῆς
σώσας με νέρθεν ἦλθον, εἴ τι δεῖ, γέρον,
ἢ χειρὸς ὑμᾶς τῆς ἐμῆς ἢ συμμαχῶν. (1163-1171)

I have come along with others, who wait beside the banks
of the Asopus, young hoplites of the land of Athens,
bringing military aid to your son, old man.
For a report arrived in the land of the Erechtheids
that Lycus had seized power in this land
and has entered into war and battle with you.
I have come here **in exchange** for the favor that Heracles did me
when he saved me from below, old man, if you have any need
of my hand or of allies.

Theseus' word choice (ἀμοιβὰς, 1169) recalls Amphitryon's earlier complaint about Greece's
lack of concern for Heracles' family:

οὐδ' Ἑλλάδ' ἤνεσ' (οὐδ' ἀνέξομαί ποτε
σιγῶν) κακίστην λαμβάνων ἐς παῖδ' ἐμόν,
ἦν χρῆν νεοσσοῖς τοῖσδε **πῦρ λόγγας ὄπλα**
φέρουσαν ἐλθεῖν, ποντίων καθαυμάτων
χέρσου τ' **ἀμοιβὰς** ὧν †ἐμόχθησας χάριν†. (222-226)

Nor do I praise Greece (I will never endure
keeping silent) since I catch her being the worst toward my son,
for she should have come **bringing fire, spears, shields**
to these hatchlings, **in exchange** for the cleansing of sea

and land, for the sake of which you, Heracles, toiled.

Theseus' repeated apostrophes to Amphitryon in his speech (πρόεσβυ, 1165; γέρον, 1170), combined with the repetition of ἀμοιβάς and the similar phrasing of the type of aid brought (σύμμαχον φέρων δόρυ, 1165; πῦρ λόγχας ὅπλα φέρουσαν, 224-225), serve as a subtle reminder of Amphitryon's earlier complaint, which Theseus is now addressing too late, at least for Heracles' wife and children.

To Heracles, however, Theseus' argument of reciprocity and the sharing of misfortune does not come too late. Throughout the *agon* between Heracles and Theseus, in which Heracles argues for and Theseus against suicide, Theseus emphasizes his sympathy for Heracles with words and phrases beginning with συν- (**συναλγῶν**, 1202; **σύν** γε σοί, 1220; **συμπλεῖν**, 1225). When Heracles finally accepts Theseus' proposal, he answers his language of sympathy by asking Theseus to join in one last labor with him, returning Cerberus to Argos, expressed with συν-prefixed verbs: ἐν μοί τι, Θησεῦ, **σύγκαμ'** ἀγρίου κυνὸς / κόμιστρο' ἐς Ἄργος **συγκατάστησον** μολῶν ("Join me in doing one thing, Theseus: come and help me convey the savage dog to Argos," 1386-1387; cf. **συμπενθήσατε**, 1390). Theseus also calls attention to his personal debt to Heracles, expressed in terms of χάρις (1223, 1238, 1336; cf. 1352), which he can now repay by helping his friend in his misfortune. Indeed, Heracles accepts Theseus' help because of his prior good deed to him: ἐπήνεσ'· εὖ δρῶσας δέ σ' οὐκ ἀναίνομαι ("I commend you. Since I have benefitted you, I do not refuse your help," 1235). The emphasis on *philia* (a form of *philos* occurs at 1215, 1223, 1225, 1234, 1252, 1283, 1337), in addition to these other expressions of support, cements the importance of Theseus' personal support to Heracles' decision to reject suicide.

Moreover, Theseus attempts to show Heracles that the rest of Greece also appreciates his service. He reminds Heracles that he is the benefactor and “great friend” (μέγας φίλος, 1252) of all mortals, and that “Greece would not endure you dying foolishly” (οὐκ ἄν <σ’> ἀνάσχοιθ’ Ἐλλάς ἀμαθία θανεῖν, 1254).⁴²⁹ Although Greece – beyond Athens – has not demonstrated its support of Heracles, Theseus argues that all mortals in Greece would recognize a debt to Heracles for his labors, which Heracles then surveys in his speech that follows, describing them “as they would affect a man, rather than a hero of mythology,” in Bond’s (1981, *ad* 1255-1310) words. Theseus’ responses to Heracles read like those of a responder on a suicide hotline, as he reminds his friend, weighed down by the psychological pain of his labors and the loss of his wife and children, that he is not alone, and that the Greek world appreciates his sacrifices for them. Theseus does something that no other character in the play has done: he thanks Heracles for his service. Moreover, this appreciation for Heracles’ labors gains greater significance because it comes from a comrade-in-arms who has himself personally benefited from Heracles’ friendship.

The argument that finally convinces Heracles to reject suicide involves Theseus’ offer of political support and honor in Athens (1322-1339), which responds directly to Heracles’ feelings of shame within his community in Thebes, and his perceived lack of community elsewhere (1279-1290).⁴³⁰ Theseus frames this aid in terms of reciprocity and the renown that Athens will receive as a result of their honors to Heracles: καλὸς γὰρ ἀστοῖς στέφανος Ἑλλήνων ὑπο / ἄνδρ’ ἐσθλὸν ὠφελούντας εὐκλείας τυχεῖν (“For it will be a noble crown for the citizens in the eyes of the Greeks to obtain renown by helping a brave man,” 1334-1335). By demonstrating

⁴²⁹ For suicide as a foolish death, cf. Eur. *Or.* 415, *Hel.* 97.

⁴³⁰ Heracles uses a *tis*-speech to convey vividly the disapproving speech of Thebans. On this Homeric device, see Wilson (1979) and de Jong (1987b). On the positive image of Athens in this play, and in Greek tragedy more generally, see Papadopoulou (2005) 151-157.

the Athenians' view of Heracles as a "brave man," Theseus responds to Heracles' worries about how he will be perceived by others after shamefully murdering his wife and children. Theseus appeals to the old, heroic Heracles, the civilizer of the world, before he killed his family.

Whereas Megara's belief that Heracles would be the same protector of his family as before was proven wrong, Theseus' assertion that Heracles will protect Athens is affirmed by the play's ending, perhaps because the Athenian *polis* offers Heracles the support of a community that he previously lacked.⁴³¹

This new community does not replace Heracles' old one – he still considers himself an "exile" (φυγάς, 1358) – but it provides Heracles with the support necessary for his recuperation.⁴³² Similarly, although it seems that Heracles' family has been suddenly, devastatingly erased from the picture as he plans his new life in Athens, Heracles himself indicates that he will not forget them:

οἴμοι δάμαρτος καὶ τέκνων, οἴμοι δ' ἐμοῦ,
ὡς ἀθλίως πέπραγα κάποξεύγνυμαι
τέκνων γυναικός τ'. ὦ λυγροὶ φιλημάτων
τέρψεις, λυγροὶ δὲ τῶνδ' ὅπλων κοινωναίαι.
ἀμηχανῶ γὰρ πότερ' ἔχω τάδ' ἢ μεθῶ,
ἂ πλευρὰ τὰμὰ προσπίτνοντ' ἐρεῖ τάδε·
Ἥμιν τέκν' εἶλες καὶ δάμαρθ'· ἡμᾶς ἔχεις
παιδοκτόνους σοῦς. εἶτ' ἐγὼ τάδ' ὠλέναις
οἴσω; τί φάσκων; ἀλλὰ γυμνωθεὶς ὅπλων
ξὺν οἷς τὰ κάλλιστ' ἐξέπραξ' ἐν Ἑλλάδι
ἐχθροῖς ἐμαυτὸν ὑποβαλὼν αἰσχροῦς θάνω;
οὐ λειπτέον τάδ', ἀθλίως δὲ σωστέον. (1374-1385)

⁴³¹ On the role of the *polis* in Heracles' rehabilitation, see Foley (1985) 165-167, 174-175, 192-204, Braden (1993) 247-249, George (1994) 155-157, Mills (1997) 129-159, Worman (1999) 102-103, and Assaël (2001) 178-186.

⁴³² Some critics read Heracles' gestures of refusal, even after he has decided to live, as challenges to the triumph of friendship and Heracles' political redemption. For pessimistic or ambivalent readings of the end of the play, see Kroeker (1938) 124, Higgins (1984) 105-109, Padilla (1994), Dunn (1996) 115-129, Griffiths (2006) 100-113, and Holmes (2008) 264.

Alas for my wife and children, and alas for me,
who am faring wretchedly and am unyoked
from children and wife. O the painful pleasure
of kissing you, and painful companionship of these weapons.
I do not know whether to keep them or to let them go,
which, falling at my side, will say:
“With us you killed your children and wife. Us,
the killers of your children, you still keep.” Or shall I
carry them on my arms? Claiming what? But stripped of my weapons,
with which I accomplished the noblest deeds in Greece,
shall I die shamefully, having submitted myself to my enemies?
I must not abandon them, but must, wretchedly, preserve them.

By giving his weapons a voice, Heracles attempts to square the double identity of his weapons, which both allowed him to accomplish his labors and caused the murder of his wife and children. By giving his weapons a voice, he dramatizes his inability to forget his shameful deed. In order to continue living, he must accept not only the dual nature of his weapons, but also the dual nature of his own character, capable of achieving peace for others, but not for his family or for himself. Though the structure of the play, as I have argued, dramatizes the disjunction between these two events (achieving peace for others, but waging war upon his family), the weapons provide Heracles with an opportunity to combine these two deeds, one noble, one shameful, in a single symbol. The weapons will continue to remind Heracles of the shameful murders, while at the same time serving as symbol of his past achievements and future battles. They exemplify the cost, the collateral damage, of weapons wielded in war and brought home.

Conclusion

Euripides' *Heracles* plays on mistaken expectations. Megara and her children tragically discover that their veteran husband and father is deeply changed, no longer the man they expected would return and protect them. Through a complex system of foreshadowing and misdirection, the audience shares in these false expectations, and in the shocking realization that they are false, a strategy that builds sympathy for Heracles' family. The similarities in both

theme and plot to the situation of Penelope's family in Ithaca contribute to this system of foreshadowing and misdirection by raising expectations of a successful return to a faithful wife. This expectation is devastatingly shattered when Heracles, who, like Odysseus, achieves victory over his enemies with a bow, returns home and instead slaughters his family with that same bow. In addition, the first half of the play dramatizes the family's struggles in the veteran's absence in terms that would have been relevant to family members of veterans in fifth-century Athens: the wife's desire to preserve the noble reputation of her household in the vacuum left by her husband's absence; the lack of support from friends and from the *polis*; and the difficulties of caring for children without the husband's support. When Heracles' madness intervenes and these concerns are no longer relevant to the plot of the play, Euripides stages the shocking lack of cause and effect in veteran domestic violence.

This play, moreover, implicitly contrasts with Sophocles' depiction of Heracles' return as undermined by his wife's past experiences of trauma. *Heracles* goes out of its way to avoid topics introduced in the *Trachiniae*: Megara rarely speaks of her past, and the theme of the concubine, which Euripides explores in his *Andromache*, never enters the equation. Instead, Euripides' Megara, like Penelope, confidently manages her household and preserves it until her husband returns, despite significant challenges. The destruction of the family emerges instead from the veteran's trauma brought home.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

πόλεμος δὲ γυναιξὶ μελήσει.⁴³³
“War will be women’s business.”
Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* 538

In Aristophanes’ account of a coup by the women of Athens to withhold sex from their husbands and thus stop the war with Sparta, the peacenik Lysistrata revises Hector’s pronouncement to Andromache that “war will be men’s business” (πόλεμος δ’ ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει, *Il.* 6.492; cf. *Lys.* 520), boldly replacing “men’s” with “women’s.” In justification of her revision, she lists some of the ways in which war affects women on the home front as much as men in the front lines:

πλεῖν γ’ ἢ τὸ διπλοῦν αὐτοῦ φέρομεν, πρώτιστον μὲν γε τεκοῦσαι
κάκπέμψασαι παῖδας ὀπλίτας. (*Lys.* 588-589)

We bear more than a double burden, first of all in bearing children,
and second in sending off our children as hoplites.

Her reference to the hardship of bearing children recalls Medea’s provocative statement that the dangers of childbirth are more than equivalent to the dangers of standing in the front lines in battle (*Med.* 250-251). The statement also recalls Deianeira’s conflation of her husband’s labors with her own labors of childbirth – both are painful and cyclical (*Trach.* 29-30).

⁴³³ The text of *Lysistrata* is taken from Wilson’s (2007) OCT edition.

Yet childbirth also constituted women's warfare in another sense, as *Lysistrata* makes clear. Women raised their sons to serve as the next generation of hoplites in the seemingly endless wars that Athens waged. Waiting wives in epic and tragedy also demonstrate that wives shouldered the burden of caring for their children while their husbands were at war. Penelope delays remarriage partially out of concern for Telemachus, and panics when she learns about the suitors' plot against him (*Od.* 4.703-705). Deianeira complains about Heracles' lack of concern for his children, whom she raises alone (*Trach.* 31-35). Megara depicts in detail the vain hopes that she had for their children, who are threatened both by Heracles' absence and by his presence (*Her.* 460-475).

Lysistrata also mentions another hardship voiced by wives of warriors in epic and tragedy:

εἶθ' ἡνίκα χρῆν εὐφρανθῆναι καὶ τῆς ἡβῆς ἀπολαῦσαι,
μονοκοιτοῦμεν διὰ τὰς στρατιάς. καὶ θῆμέτερον μὲν ἔασω,
περὶ τῶν δὲ κορῶν ἐν τοῖς θαλάμοις γηρασκουσῶν ἀνιώμαι. (*Lys.* 591-593)

Then, when we should be having fun and enjoying our youth,
we sleep alone because of the campaigns. But enough of our own problems,
I'm also distressed about the girls growing old in their bedrooms.

Loneliness was perhaps the most obvious hardship of waiting wives (and mothers, sisters, and daughters), as is confirmed by the ubiquity of this complaint by wives in epic and tragedy.⁴³⁴ Difficulties with sleep, embedded in *Lysistrata's* complaint (μονοκοιτοῦμεν, 592), follow from this loneliness, as the time spent intimately together at night is replaced by worry and anxiety (cf. *Ag.* 887-894, *Trach.* 29-30).

⁴³⁴ Schaps (1982) 206, who is suspicious of dramatic evidence for women's attitudes toward war, nonetheless writes of *Lys.* 591-593, "Surely the most immediate hardship [for women in wartime] was loneliness: other problems might come later, but a woman was lonely from the day that the army left."

Moreover, these poems also demonstrate that loneliness often entails a more pernicious social isolation, in which wives can find no one in their households (or wider society) in whom to confide or to whom they can turn for help. Penelope, Deianeira, and Megara are particularly affected by their isolation: Penelope can find no support among the Ithacans against the suitors' plot to ambush and kill Telemachus; Deianeira's panicked mistake emerges from her confusion about whom she can trust; and Megara and her family have been abandoned by the Thebans, despite their belief that their city owes them help in return for Heracles' service.

This brief comparison between the concerns expressed by tragic waiting wives and Lysistrata's concerns shows that there is overlap in the ways that these characters conceived of the hardships of life as a waiting wife, despite the difference in genre and the divide between the mythological content of the tragedies and the contemporary political content of the comedy. Nonetheless, the comedy soon moves away from the everyday hardships of life on the home front in favor of the sex-driven antics of its plot. Tragic waiting wives help fill in the gap, voicing other complaints that may have been relevant to fifth-century Athenian women. The two that emerge as consistent concerns across these *nostos* plays are the destructive power of rumors and the husband's sexual infidelity. Clytemnestra's lying speech, for example, vividly depicts the traumatic effects of hearing false report after false report about her absent husband (*Ag.* 864-872). The *Trachiniae* depicts Deianeira in the process of receiving one of these false reports: though intended to spare her feelings, Lichas' false message in fact plays upon Deianeira's deepest fears (*Trach.* 225-496). Likewise, Penelope and Megara are both confronted with contradictory reports about whether their husbands are dead or alive, which make their decisions about the future much harder to make (*Od.* 14.126-130, 19.185-202; *Eur. Her.* 551-553).

Sexual infidelity as a concern of waiting wives is highlighted by the reactions of Clytemnestra and Deianeira to their husbands' concubines, Cassandra and Iole, in *Agamemnon* and *Trachiniae*. Although it was probably not common for the average fifth-century hoplite to bring home a concubine as a replacement wife, it *was* the common fate of women whose city was conquered to be enslaved by their conquerors.⁴³⁵ Rape as a tactic of war is also attested in both historical and literary sources.⁴³⁶ This war-related traffic in women may have caused wives at home to feel uneasy about their status in their sexual relationships with their husbands when they returned from war. Modern wives of veterans also report changes in their sexual relationships with their husbands after they return home from combat.⁴³⁷

In addition to the often grueling experience of waiting, the tragedies also stage the negative effects of war trauma on the family after the soldier returns. Tragedy diverges from epic in its attention to the ways in which a soldier's return can create, rather than solve, problems for his family. Each tragedy focuses on a different scenario of how a soldier's return home and reunion with his family can break down. Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* depicts a divided home front, where resentment for the loss of life in the war has created a dangerous situation for Agamemnon at home. Clytemnestra's resentment because of the loss of her daughter mirrors the complaints of the citizens of Argos, but her violent revenge, her adultery, and her grab for power complicate her claims to justice. Clytemnestra is, perhaps, the hardest tragic wife to relate to, but her

⁴³⁵ Cf. Hdt. 6.18-20; Thuc. 3.36.2, 3.68.2, 4.48.4, 5.3.4, 5.32.1, 5.116.4; Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.5; Diod. Sic. 13.62.4. See also Schaps (1982) 204-205.

⁴³⁶ See Gaca (2010) for rape as a tactic in ancient warfare and Gaca (2014) for the evidence of this practice in Homeric epic and tragedy.

⁴³⁷ See Laura's description of sex with her husband, Bruce, a Vietnam vet with PTSD in Matsakis (1996) 82: "Bruce is a terrific lover, but when I get into bed with him, I get into bed with Vietnam too – with the memories and the mood swings and with the times where it feels as if Bruce is just using me to forget. Other times, because of his depression caused by PTSD, he is almost totally uninterested in sex."

resentment at the loss of her daughter and her struggle to voice her complaints in a patriarchal system rigged against her prefigure Lysistrata's complaints about women's lack of agency in politics and women's double burden of bearing children only to see them shipped off for the war effort.

Sophocles' *Trachiniae* focuses on a more personal impediment to the successful reunion of wife and husband. This play depicts, in astonishing detail, how Deianeira's past trauma continues to affect her in the present, both in her narration of past events and in her decision-making about the future, particularly regarding the return of her husband. The insights of psychiatrist Judith Herman (1992) into the damage to relational life caused by both sexual assault and combat shed light on the structure of this play, which is divided between the pain of the rape victim and the pain of the combat veteran. Both husband and wife are tragically isolated to the end, without friends or family to help them make sense of their fears and failures.

Euripides' *Heracles*, in some respects the darkest play of the three,⁴³⁸ stages the now familiar trope of the veteran who brings the war home. The first half of the play mirrors the Ithaca books of the *Odyssey*. Megara, like Penelope, is faithful and assiduous in caring for her household and family, despite the threats of a usurping tyrant. Yet this set-up receives an unexpectedly horrifying conclusion when Heracles returns with his bow and, rather than save his family, murders them in a fit of madness. Heracles' fit of madness, during which he believes he is engaged in a battle against his enemy, Eurystheus, and his children, resembles modern accounts of veteran domestic violence. Megara and the children become the victims of the wars

⁴³⁸ Perhaps this play influenced Aristotle's estimation of Euripides as "the most tragic of the poets" (τραγικώτατος γε τῶν ποιητῶν, *Poetics* 1453a).

Heracles fought in order to protect them and others. Heracles' recuperation at the end of the play does not erase the disturbing picture that Euripides presents of a family torn apart by war trauma.

Each of these plays, in addition to the *Odyssey*, emphasizes the importance of the support of a wider community as wives, husbands, and children confront the struggles that accompany the soldier's deployment and return. This message, relevant as it must have been to the Athenian society for which it was produced, is also perhaps the most important takeaway for modern viewers and readers of these plays. In a recent essay in *Vanity Fair*, journalist Sebastian Junger (2015) grapples with the question of why more and more veterans today experience chronic PTSD, which has resulted in soaring suicide rates. He suggests that one reason may be the increasing isolation of soldiers in modern society: "A modern soldier returning from combat goes from the kind of close-knit situation that humans evolved for into a society where most people work outside the home, children are educated by strangers, families are isolated from wider communities, personal gain almost completely eclipses collective good, and people sleep alone or with a partner [...] Whatever the technological advances of modern society—and they're nearly miraculous—the individual lifestyles that those technologies spawn may be deeply brutalizing to the human spirit."

Spouses of veterans with PTSD, who often become their partners' caretakers, complain of a similarly brutalizing isolation. Stacy Bannerman (2015, 129), who is working to create programs for military families and caregivers, writes, "researchers have found that community conversations about the nature of ambiguous loss can promote meaning and hope, and formal and informal social support can help mediate the negative effects of living with someone with PTSD. But nobody is talking about this; there aren't any public health forums or monthly meetings for families of veterans." In the same way that Bryan Doerries (2015, 57-152) has

found Greek tragedy to be a useful starting point for helping veterans talk about their struggles adjusting to civilian life, the plays discussed in this dissertation also offer useful starting points for much-needed conversations about the struggles of veterans' families, particularly their spouses. Tragedy may have played a similar role in ancient Athens, articulating the concerns and hardships of men and women gripped by the trauma of war, while at the same time educating their viewers about the importance of a supportive community for individuals and families recovering from trauma.

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